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REPRODUCTION AND OPPORTUNITY IN TALENT DEVELOPMENT

A SPORTS SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY
OF DANISH SPORTSCLASSES

**BY
LOTTE STAUSGAARD SKRUBBELTRANG**

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED 2018



AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

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AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

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CV

Lotte Stausgaard Skrubbeltrang graduated with a master of arts in Learning and Innovative Change from Aalborg University in 2012. She got her bachelor in Sports Science in 2010 with a minor in English, also from Aalborg University. Since 2012 she has been working at Aalborg University the faculty of Medicine and Health, first as a teaching assistant professor and later as a teaching associate professor. In 2013 she began her ph.d. project. Lotte has supervised several bachelor projects and has been responsible of the development and coordination of several bachelor level courses in social science. The involvement in these courses initiated a research study, *the language of football*, together with Niels Nygaard Rossing. This research was published in Sport and Society in 2017.

In 2014 Lotte joined the research project: Idrætsskoler - plads til idrætstalenter I den danske folkeskole [SportsClasses – a place for talented athletes in the Danish public school]. The project was run by Jens Christian Nielsen, Associate Professor at Danish School of Education, Aarhus University and Jesper Stilling Olesen, Associate Professor at Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. This collaboration has resulted in two published reports on SportsClasses, contributions to a book that will be published in the 2018, 1 published book chapter and 3 published research articles.

In 2014 Lotte received grant from Mette Winkler fonden to help fund a research visit in 2015 to Bryn Mawr College in USA to collaborate with Professor David Karen.

ENGLISH SUMMARY

A growing focus on talent development in sports has led several countries, including Denmark, to adopt so-called dual-career initiatives to ensure that athletes are provided opportunities to pursue a career in sports while obtaining an education. Most research on dual-career initiatives has focused on athletes above the age of 15 who are enrolled in high school or university programs. Therefore, little is known about the consequences and effects of the programs aimed at younger athletes. Furthermore, because most research on talent development focuses on psychological or club cultural aspects of talent development, there is a lack of knowledge about the effects social background can have on talent development and dual career.

In this article-based dissertation, I investigate Danish SportsClasses – a program aimed at athletes in 7th–9th grade (ages 13–15). The program is a collaboration between Team Danmark, the Danish Sports Association and local public schools. The published works of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu inspire this dissertation's theoretical framework. The aim is to investigate how talent is practiced in SportsClasses and the social implications of this approach. The dissertation is grounded in an ethnographic study of a Danish SportsClass (2013–2015) along with statistical analyses of two national surveys of all SportsClass students in Team Danmark-supported SportsClasses. In my analyses, I have focused on three aspects of the SportsClass program: 1) how students are selected for the program; 2) how students experience the SportsClasses and how their experiences are related to their social background, type of sport and gender; and 3) how the students construct their future aspirations in sports and education in relation to social background, type of sport and gender. These analyses led to three research products. In each of these products, I address one or more of these three aspects.

My findings indicate that when investigating a talent development program such as SportsClasses from a sports sociological perspective, it becomes evident that 'talent' is about more than a sport-specific skill set and that talent must be understood in

relation to social structure. The findings from my three articles show that talent selection, students' experience of the SportsClasses and their constructions of aspirations in school and sports are closely related to social background and gender.

Access to the SportsClasses is not entirely a question of sport-specific skills; it is also related to external factors, e.g., number of applicants and gender and type of sport distribution in the applicant pool. My studies also note an overrepresentation of students from middle and high socioeconomic backgrounds in the SportsClasses, despite intentions to create equal opportunities by placing SportsClasses in public schools.

Findings from my studies suggest that the SportsClass initiative risks pushing toward an earlier specialization, despite most research in talent development advising against this approach. I found that 40% of boys and 60% of girls have been injured and experienced lack of motivation because of the increased hours of training in the program.

My studies have shown that more attention should be given to female athletes because they are more likely to drop out of sports than are the male athletes. The career opportunities in sports are more limited for female athletes, which might explain why the girls in this study are more likely to focus on obtaining a degree.

Finally, my studies have found that more students from the middle and upper-middle class are accepted into the SportsClasses, but that these students are less likely to aspire to a career in sports compared with students from a lower socioeconomic background.

My overall findings suggest that social background and gender should be given much more attention than has most of the research on talent development done to date. Recognizing that talent development is about more than simply identifying the display of embodied capital but rather also reflects access to a broad variety of resources that have different values in different contexts could help in devising

policies that succeed in creating opportunity for all applicants rather than reproduce social structures.

DANSK RESUME

I de senere år er der kommet øget fokus på talentudvikling i idræt og som følge deraf har flere lande, inklusiv Danmark, introduceret såkaldte Dual Career forløb, der tillader atleter og unge talenter at kombinere skole og idrætskarriere. Størstedelen af de internationale Dual Career forløb er rettet mod atleter på gymnasiale og videregående uddannelser. I forskning i og omkring Dual Career har fokus også primært været rettet mod på atleter over 15 år. Det er således sparsomt med viden omkring tilbud, der er rettet mod elever i grundskolen.

I denne artikelbaserede ph.d.-afhandling rettes fokus mod mødet mellem talentudvikling til eliteidræt og den danske folkeskole i Team Danmark-støttede *Idrætsskoler (7.-9. klassetrin)*. Formålet med afhandlingen er at forstå, hvordan talent praktiseres i idrætsskolerne og hvad de sociale implikationer er af at praktisere talent på denne måde. Intentionen er at bidrage med viden om, de implikationer der følger af at kombinere folkeskole og idræt i et koordineret talentudviklingsarbejde. Afhandlingen tager udgangspunkt i et teoretisk begrebsunivers, der er inspireret af den franske sociolog Pierre Bourdieus værker. Afhandlingen bygger på et 3 årigt etnografisk studie af en idrætsskole samt analyser af to spørgeskemaundersøgelser blandt alle elever i Team Danmark-støttede idrætsskoler i 2013 og 2015. I arbejdet har der været fokus på tre aspekter af idrætsskoleforløbet: 1) hvordan selekteres atleter til idrætsskolerne 2) hvordan oplever idrætseleverne idrætsskolen, og hvordan er det relateret til deres sociale baggrund, deres valg af idrætsgren og deres køn 3) hvordan konstruerer idrætseleverne deres fremtidsaspirationer med afsæt i deres sociale baggrund, type idrætsgren og køn. Dette arbejde har affødt tre forskningspublikationer, som hver især behandler et eller flere af disse aspekter.

Min undersøgelse viser, at ved at undersøge talentudvikling i en sportssociologisk ramme bliver det tydeligere, at talent ikke blot handler om idrætsspecifikke færdigheder, men må forstås i relation til strukturelle forhold. Eksterne faktorer

såsom antal af pladser i klassen og kønsfordelingen blandt ansøgere spiller også ind. Min undersøgelse viser ligeledes, at der i idrætsskolerne er en overrepræsentation af elever fra middel og høj socioøkonomisk baggrund, på trods af forsøg på gøre adgang til idrætsskolerne tilgængelige for alle.

Ydermere viser min undersøgelse, at der i tiltag som idrætsskolerne er risiko for at skabe frafald blandt udøverne på grund af skader og oplevelser af udbændthed som følge af øget træningsmængde. Således viser mit studie, at denne måde at organisere talentudvikling på kan risikere at presse for en tidligere specialisering, på trods af at studier i talentudvikling fraråder denne tilgang.

Mit studie viser også, at der er større frafald blandt kvindelige idrætsskoleelever end mandelige, og at færre kvindelige idrætselever ønsker at satse på en eliteidrætskarriere. Dette kan skyldes, at en elitekarriere for de færreste kvindelige atleter er ensbetydende økonomisk velstand, hvorfor de kvindelige idrætselever i stedet fokuserer deres kræfter på uddannelse, der opleves som en mere sikker satsning. Lignende tendenser findes hos eleverne med middel og høj socioøkonomisk baggrund, som ifølge mine studier lader til i højere grad at fokusere på uddannelse frem for eliteidrætskarriere. Modsat viser resultater fra mit tredje studie, at elever med lav socioøkonomisk baggrund i højere grad søger en eliteidrætskarriere.

Overordnet viser mit studie, at der i forhold til talentudvikling bør være større fokus på betydningen af social baggrund og køn, da dette lader til at have betydning for fastholdelsen i sporten. Ligeledes har mine studier vist, at adgang til talentudviklingsprogrammer som idrætsskolerne har at gøre med mere end blot medfødt talent eller mange timers træning. Eksterne faktorer såsom antallet af ansøgere og kønsfordeling samt den enkelte ansøgers ressourcer har indflydelse på, hvem der kommer ind.

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I want to thank Jens Christian Nielsen and Jesper Stilling Olesen for letting me become part of their research project. It has been inspiring to be part of the project and I value all your support and contributions.

I would like to thank my wonderful colleagues at Aalborg University. Thanks to my colleagues at CFU for all your help and discussions in the beginning of the project. I would also like to thank my colleagues at HST, especially the SportsSciences group for all your support. A special thanks to Niels Nygaard Rossing and Ludvig Johan Torp Rasmussen for providing a fun and inspiring office milieu, to Kenneth Larsen for your encouragement, to Kathrine Liedtke and Verena Lenneis for fruitful discussions and help with the dissertation, and thank you Diana Stentoft for always taking the time to help me find solutions to my problems.

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I also want to thank my other supervisor David Karen. Thank you so much for all your help, mentoring and encouragement throughout the process, for opening your home to me during my visits to Bryn Mawr College, and last but not least for teaching me to struggle well.

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Most of all I want to thank Dan for all your patience and encouragements, our fruitful discussions, your help, and most of all for always being there.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is based on the published or submitted research publications that are listed below.

1. Skrubbeltrang, L. S., and Rasmussen, A. (2014). Competitive Advantage of Concerted Cultivation versus Natural Growth of Sports Talents in: *Performativity in Education - An International Collection of Ethnographic Research on Learners Experiences* (edt. Annette Rasmussen, Jan Gustafsson and Bob Jeffrey). E&E publishing
2. Skrubbeltrang, L.S. (Under review) *Marginalized Gender, Marginalized Sports - An ethnographic study of SportsClass Students' future aspirations in elitesports*. Sport In Society – under revision (with major revisions) re-submitted August 2018
3. Skrubbeltrang, L.S., Karen, D., Olesen, J.S. and Nielsen, J.C. (2018) *Reproduction and Opportunity – A Study of Dual Career, Aspirations and Elite Sports in Danish SportsClasses*. Published online in: *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.

The following figure shows how the dissertation is organized. The dissertation consists of 6 chapters. In chapter 1, I briefly introduce the dissertation, present my research questions, and provide an overview of the papers included in this dissertation. In chapter 2, I present SportsClasses as my field of research. I describe the historic development of elite sports in Denmark and some of the policy changes in Danish public schools in the 2000s to contextualize the SportsClasses. I then present an outline of research in talent development in sports and in dual career to show how my research is positioned within this field of research. Chapter 3 provides an overview and description of the theoretical framework of the dissertation, and in chapter 4, I present my study design. In chapter 5, I present summaries of each of

my papers, consisting of brief accounts of the papers' aims, additions to the theoretical framework, methods and conclusions. Chapter 6 is a discussion of my research question in relation to the findings from the three papers. In the last chapter, I conclude with an overview of my contributions.

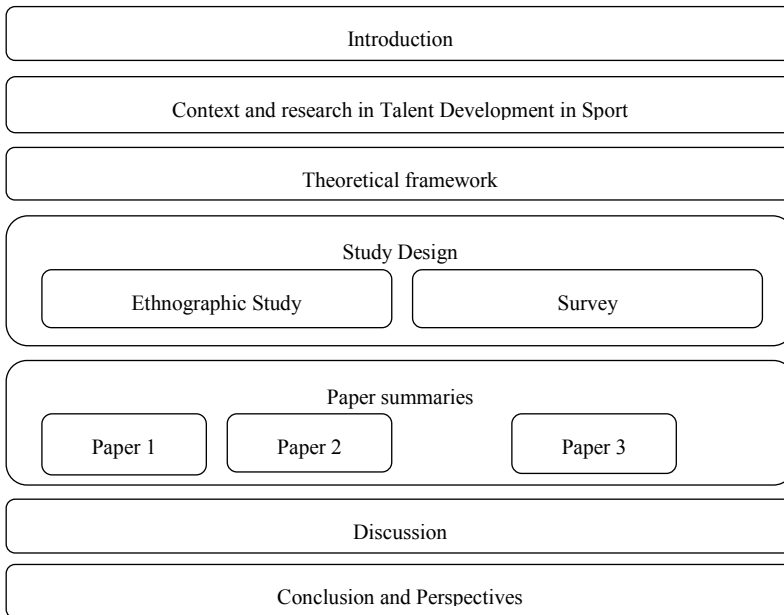


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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is concerned with athletic talent development in Denmark. I focus on SportsClasses (grades 7–9) that were made possible by the 2004 Danish Elite Sports Law and were instituted after the 2013 Danish school reform (School Law). The first Danish Elite Sports Law from 1984 was introduced to ensure that elite sports was done in a “*socially and societally sound manner*” and that talent development and engagement in competitive sports should be limited to athletes above the age of 15 to encourage the development of Complete Sports Persons¹ (Kulturministeriet, 1984; Løvstrup & Hansen, 2002). In 2004, this age limit was changed to 12 years, and in 2005, the first SportsClasses were introduced (Nielsen, Olesen, & Skrubbeltrang, 2017).

The SportsClasses policy has introduced a framework for sports clubs to conduct talent development in collaboration with specific public schools. The intention behind choosing public instead of private was to ensure that a talented athlete, no matter their background, could live out their dream of becoming an elite athlete. However, as I will describe in more detail in chapter 2, research into specialized educational programs similar to the SportsClasses (e.g., in arts and sciences) has found that these programs tend to cater to the needs of more-advantaged middle-class families (Ferry, 2014; Lareau, 2011; Lund, 2012). During the first years of the SportsClasses’ existence, the SportsClasses were subject to controversy because students had to apply for and were selected during entrance exams for the SportsClasses. This selection process was viewed as contradicting the comprehensive and universalistic principle of the Danish primary school – to offer equal education to all. Therefore, SportsClasses throughout the country were temporarily banned from conducting entrance exams (Hansen, 2010). From 2012–2013, the SportsClasses were allowed to conduct entrance exams because of a

¹ Described as an athlete with versatile social, physical and psychological abilities.

dispensation granted by the Ministry of Education. In 2014, a new school reform was passed that permitted entrance exams. With these changes to the School Law, the SportsClasses are no longer only a different means of conducting talent development but also a new way for clubs to collaborate with public schools. The implementation of these changes also calls for research into what these changes in the structure of talent development entail for those enrolled in the program and how talent is practiced in SportsClasses.

To date, most research on talent development in sports has been of three types: 1) research focused on former or current elite sport athletes' roads to stardom and how they were identified (Elferink-Gemser, Jordet, Coelho-E-Silva, & Visscher, 2011); 2) studies that focus on environmental aspects of talent development such as club culture and relationships in sports clubs (e.g., Henriksen, 2010; Storm, 2015); and 3) psychological research on dual career, in which the focus has been on how programs can help athletes develop *life skills* and make less problematic their transitions into and out of elite sports (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavalée, 2004). This research has predominantly relied on retrospective, individualistic, and psychological accounts to identify the athletic precursors that made the athletes successful (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009; Wylleman et al., 2004). There has been only limited focus on the social backgrounds of the successful, and almost no attention has been given to the social background of the talent development program participants (Reeves, McRobert, Littlewood, & Roberts, 2018).

Research done on school-and-sport programs has predominantly focused on programs aimed at high school students (secondary school) (e.g., Brown, 2015, 2016; M. K. Christensen & Sorensen, 2009; Ferry & Lund, 2016; Kristiansen & Houlihan, 2017; Massey, 2010; Radtke & Coalter, 2007; van Rens, Elling, & Reijgersberg, 2015). With the increased global focus on competitive sports and talent development, it is necessary to understand the social context of and social implications for those enrolled in school-sports programs. This dissertation adds knowledge to the body of research on talent development and dual career by

providing a sociological analysis of students enrolled in a dual-career initiative aimed at younger talented athletes in 7th–9th grade in lower secondary school (ages 13–15).

1.1. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As mentioned above, my research is driven by interest in the introduction of SportsClasses as an approach to structuring elite sport talent development and in its social implications. I was further intrigued by what this approach to structuring talent development entailed for those enrolled in the SportsClass program. This interest led to the following research question:

How is talent practiced in Danish SportsClasses and what are the wider social implications of this practice?

I address the *practice* of talent because I intend to analyze the relationship between structure and agency in the context of a national program of social selection for elite sports (Bourdieu, 1977). Such an analysis examines individuals' actions in relation to social structures. By asking how talent is practiced, I attempt to understand talent, not as a property of an individual or as an abstract conception or ideal devised by coaches and experts but rather as something that emerges relationally among the interacting agents within the SportsClass program. As I will describe in chapter 3, this dissertation is inspired theoretically by Bourdieu's structuralist constructivism or realistic constructivism (Bourdieu, 1999; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996; Järvinen, 2000), which means that the social world consists of both objective structures, which operate regardless of the agents' knowledge and will, and of agents' collectively and socially constructed structures. In this understanding, talent as well as the students' experiences and aspirations must be understood in relation to one another and in terms of their position in the social structure. The Bourdieusian relational approach allows me to view the SportsClass students through a set of socially produced classifications – social background, gender and type of sport. In using these classifications and focusing on the role they play in the selection of talent for the

SportsClasses, on how the students experience the SportsClasses, and on how the SportsClasses affect students' future aspirations in sports/and or education, I position my research within a sociology-of-sport-inspired approach to talent development and dual career.

In this dissertation, I pose three thesis subquestions, each in turn focusing on one of three stages of the SportsClass program to answer my research question: the selection process, the time spent in the SportsClass, and the exit from the SportsClass program. The three subquestions are

- *How are students selected for the SportsClasses?*
- *How do SportsClass students experience the SportsClass and how does this experience relate to their social background, type of sport and gender?*
- *Given their social background, gender, and type of sport, how do SportsClass students construct their aspirations in sports and education?*

These questions are addressed in the three research products that make up this dissertation. The questions have been addressed based on data collected through an ethnographic study (SportsClass observations from 2013–2015) and surveys (2013 and 2015). The first two research products rely on the ethnographic work, whereas the third relies on the survey data.

In the first research product, a book chapter, Annette Rasmussen and I posed the following research question: *What constitutes talent performativity for students in an elite sports class and how – by what strategies – have the particular relationships between sports and school performances been developed?* This article relied on my ethnographic study in a SportsClass and observations of entrance exams. The observations of entrance exams addressed the first thesis subquestion, whereas my ethnographic study in the SportsClass addressed the second subquestion.

In the second research product, a journal article, I posed the following research question: *How do SportsClass students experience the SportsClass as contributing*

to their future aspirations and how is this experience related to their gender and the relative marginality of their sport? This article relied on my ethnographic study in a SportsClass and addressed my second and third thesis subquestions.

In the third research product, a journal article, David Karen, Jens Christian Nielsen, Jesper Stilling Olesen and I posed the following research questions: 1. *What are the social backgrounds of the athletes enrolled in the SportsClasses*; 2. *How are gender, social background and choice of sport related to the students' experience of the SportsClasses*; and 3. *How do these variables relate to participants' future aspirations with respect to both school and sports?* This paper relied on two surveys of SportsClass students conducted in Denmark, and it addressed my second and third thesis subquestions.

1.2. LIST OF PAPERS

4. Skrubbeltrang, L. S. and Rasmussen, A. (2014). Competitive Advantage of Concerted Cultivation versus Natural Growth of Sports Talents in: *Performativity in Education - An International Collection of Ethnographic Research on Learners Experiences* (edt. Annette Rasmussen, Jan Gustafsson and Bob Jeffrey). E&E publishing
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CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT AND RESEARCH ON TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN SPORT

In this chapter, I will set the context for the introduction of SportsClasses in Denmark. I do so by describing the historic development of elite sports, elite sport policy changes in Denmark and changes in Danish public schools in the early 2000s. I will then report on research on talent development in sports and on dual career.

2.1. THE EMERGING FIELD OF ELITE SPORTS AND DIVERGING IDEAS IN DANISH SPORTS

With its increased mediatization (television and online), ceaseless migration of top athletes, and explosion of fan bases across the world, sports has become one of the world's leading globalizing institutions (Karen & Washington, 2015). Sports has become a multibillion dollar industry and functions as an important societal focus at a global and local level (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004; D. Karen & Washington, 2015). Sports has also become a field of symbolic power struggles, in which nations compete against one another in a global sporting arms race and in which medals won also become emblems of nations' superiority or proficiency (De Bosscher, 2016; De Bosscher, Bingham, Shibli, Von Bottenberg, & De Knop, 2008; Oakley & Green, 2001).

Much as in other Scandinavian countries, organized sports in Denmark springs from mass movements and, therefore, sport policies in the post-Second World War period in Denmark have been driven by social democratic values and mass sports investments (S. S. Andersen & Rongland, 2012; Goksøyr, Andersen, & Asdal, 1996). Not until the first Act on Elite Sport (1984) and with this, the formation of a

Danish elite sports organization, Team Danmark, was a legal framework for elite sports established (Løvstrup & Hansen, 2002).

Leading up to the establishment of Team Danmark and the passing of the Act on Elite Sport, support for elite sports in Denmark was highly contested. Mass and elite sports were undifferentiated, meaning that no special attention was given to either of the two until 1984, when legislation to advance elite sports was passed (Bøje & Eichberg, 1994; Løvstrup & Hansen, 2002). The new law was preceded by 14 years of commission work to clarify the social significance and position of elite sports (Eichberg, 2012).

In 1970, the Ministry of Culture formed a commission to draft *Executive Order No. 709 on sports and outdoor activities* (Kulturministeriet, 1974) to “analyze the current conditions and future social position of sports – both competitive and other types of sports that aim to promote physical well-being” (Løvstrup & Hansen, 2002, p. 17). The debate reflected little political interest in giving elite sports a special position in society, and Minister of Culture Niels Matthiasen said, “As far as public support for sports, the primary goal must be to accommodate mass sports” (Løvstrup & Hansen, 2002, p. 21) [my translation]. In fact, the executive order made clear that pursuing a career in elite sports was not a state matter and that the individual athlete’s desire to perform had to be sufficiently strong to “counter even fairly radical deprivation and physical and mental exertions associated with an elite career” (Kulturministeriet, 1974, p. 75) [my translation].

The poor Olympic performance in 1976 by Denmark’s otherwise successful men’s handball team refueled the debate about elite sports. Several of the national team members cancelled their participation in the 1978 World Cup because their elite sports careers were incompatible financially and time-wise with family and job. In an open letter to the Minister of Culture, the national coach explained that the team underperformed because the athletes had to work or study full time alongside their commitment to their sport and that society failed to provide adequate support. This letter kicked off a debate about societal support for elite sports and ultimately

resulted in *Executive Order No. 992 about elite sports in Denmark* (December 28, 1979), which later led to the final Act No. 643 about the advancement of elite sports and the establishment of the elite organization Team Danmark in 1984 (Hansen, 2012).

Although it was poor results that triggered this debate, the objective of the new sports initiative appeared to be inspired more by a broad political understanding of social-ethical commitment to ensure the athletes access to education during their active careers than to actual results in sporting competition (Lerborg, 2002). During the debate, how elite sports athletes tended to come from higher social backgrounds had been discussed (Løvstrup & Hansen, 2002). The aim was to make Denmark the best country in the world for elite sports, which would be performed in a “*socially and societally sound manner*” (Kulturministeriet, 1984) [my translation]. Reference also was made to a democratization of or equal access to elite sports (Løvstrup & Hansen, 2002). Danish support for elite sports, therefore, must ensure that the entire population had the opportunity to participate and, potentially, to succeed. The pattern of elite athletes coming disproportionately from higher social backgrounds had to be addressed if Denmark were to be the best country in the world for elite sports. Support for elite sports must be pursued using democratic methods (Løvstrup & Hansen, 2002). This type of approach could be explained as an approach that ensures that the fairness of the meritocratic contest is matched by fairness in access to the training necessary to compete in elite sports (Karen & Washington, 2015).

At that time, the youngest age for supporting and focusing on talented athletes was 15. It was believed that participating in too competitive an environment at a young age could have negative effects on the athlete’s social, physical and psychical development (Team Danmark & Danmarks Idræts-Forbund, 2006). In 1999, the Social Liberal Minister of Culture formed a task group to investigate whether “*the legal framework [for elite sports] meets future challenges to a sufficient extent*” (Kulturministeriet, 2001, p. 5). The group recommended changing the existing age limit of 15 so that athletes under 15 would be able to receive support. The argument was that age 15 was too late to target intensive training for athletes due to the

increased competition in international elite sports and that it was necessary to ensure that the early specialization already practiced in sports (e.g., swimming and gymnastics) was overseen by Team Danmark (Kulturministeriet, 2001). Furthermore, the appointed task group had not found evidence to support the proposition that young athletes needed protection from competitive sports (Kulturministeriet, 2001). Therefore, the age limit was lowered from 15 to 12 in 2004 (Nielsen & Olesen, 2014; Pedersen, 2012). This change in policy also indicated a shift in how competitive sports and talent development was to be understood. Instead of protecting young athletes from competitive sports, Team Danmark would now help guide and educate young athletes in life as an elite athlete (Meibom, Bach, & Henriksen, 2016).

The subsequent agreement between the Ministry of Culture and Team Danmark (Team Danmark & Kulturministeriet, 2009) targeted athletes aged 12–18 for their further development – in sports *and* in general. Elite sports still had to be run in a ‘socially and sound manner,’ not only catering to the athletes’ sporting needs but also making it possible to create *complete sports persons* with versatile physical, psychological and social competencies by offering better opportunities for combining education and jobs with a career in sports.

2.1.1. INSTITUTIONALIZING TALENT DEVELOPMENT – SPORTS CLASSES

Although other countries such as the US, China and the former Soviet Union have a longer tradition of selecting young people for elite sports and combining education and sports, this approach is a relatively new phenomenon in Denmark (Bøje & Eichberg, 1994; Evalueringsinstitut & Idan, 2009; Kulturministeriet, 2011). Athletes have been able to apply to high schools supported by Team Danmark since 1988. These high school programs allow athletes to prolong their high school education from 3 to 4 years or to finish in 3 years with greater flexibility with respect to exams and papers. Conversely, combining sports and school in lower secondary school is a

relatively new initiative initially introduced in 2005 in Esbjerg. The SportsClasses allow talented athletes to combine specialized training in their chosen sport with their education in grades 7–9 in Danish public schools. In 2007, the program expanded to more schools in different regions of the country.

The intention was to provide athletes with better opportunities to combine sports and school and to generate a larger pool of the athletically talented to be able to compete internationally in the future (Team Danmark & Danmarks Idræts-Forbund, 2009). This approach largely mimics those approaches found in other western countries (Collins, Martindale, Button, & Sowerby, 2010; Fisher & Borms, 1990; Kirk, Brettschneider, & Auld, 2005; Kirk & Gorely, 2000).

As opposed to the regular classes in public schools, students in SportsClasses must apply for the program and pass an entrance exam administered by experts/representatives from sports associations and club trainers from the applicant's sport discipline. The entrance exams are meant to focus exclusively on the students' athletic ability and potential for development (Nielsen et al., 2017). The overall objective is to choose those with the greatest sports talent and offer them a specialized, flexibly organized educational program in the later years of their state-school education.

It is worth pointing out that in the first years of the SportsClasses' existence, the entrance exams were viewed as contradicting the comprehensive and universalistic principle of the Danish primary school – to offer equal education to all – and SportsClasses throughout the country were temporarily banned from conducting entrance exams (Hansen, 2010). The SportsClass' representatives advanced the counterargument that the entrance exams did not concern the students' academic level and, moreover, were conducted by the sports clubs and the national sports associations, not the schools (Undervisningsministeriet, 2010). The Ministry of Education eventually gave the elite municipalities dispensation to conduct the entrance exams through the school year 2012/2013. When the 2014–2015 school reform was passed, the entrance exams were permitted, and talented athletes were

now allowed to miss parts of their compulsory education due to elite sport activities (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014). The SportsClass students are taught the same obligatory subjects as other students, but they gain access to two weekly morning practices, and attempts are made to align students' schoolwork and homework assignments with their training schedules. The morning practices are often coordinated by and occur in collaboration with local elite clubs. Trainers from the clubs and associations that are part of the SportsClass program provide morning practices for the most popular types of sports (e.g., football, handball, swimming, badminton, and ice hockey). The less popular sports often receive a 'general' morning practice in which the focus is on strength and conditioning.

2.1.2. SCHOOL AND SPORTS – INTRODUCING TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND FREE SCHOOL CHOICE

Although the SportsClasses are a relatively new initiative for Danish sports, creating specialized tracks for talented students follows well-established national and international educational currents.

In 2011, the Danish Ministry of Education issued a report stating the importance of *“spotting and developing students with specific learning potentials”* (Hermann et al., 2011, p. 48). According to Rasmussen and Rasmussen (2015), this way of thinking about talent in relation to school is part of a global education policy development that focuses on competition and talent development as a main factor in economic growth and social development. This focus has led to the development of talent programs in several Western countries that cater to middle-class parents' wishes and expectations (Ball, 2003) and that allow identification of and focus on the intellectual elite (Ball, 2017). This pattern follows a process of neoliberalization that many Western countries have gone through in recent decades (Ferry, 2014; Lund, 2012). This development has been driven by liberal ideas of the development of society without state intervention and is often manifested in deregulation of national markets, reduction of state power and privatization of public programs (Coakley,

2011) with the aim of increased consumerism and individual choice (Ferry, 2014). In Scandinavian countries, known for their welfare systems, this change has pushed parents to act as consumers when choosing a school or in pursuing a healthier life (Blomqvist, 2004; Daun, 2006).

In Denmark, this development became increasingly salient when the 2005 School Choice Act gave parents the right to choose a public school² other than the one allocated to them by the municipality (Wiborg & Larsen, 2017).

An evaluation of this free school choice Act in Denmark showed that only 3.4% of parents with children already enrolled in the Danish public school moved their children to a different public school in 2010 (Rambøll, 2011; Wiborg & Larsen, 2017). Although parents have not changed schools as much as intended, parents have increasingly been enrolling their children in private or independent schools (14% and as many as 25% in Copenhagen, respectively), making school choice attractive as long as it means leaving the public schools (Wiborg & Larsen, 2017). Rangvid (2008) argued that parents usually change school if children of immigrant families exceed 30% in the public school assigned by the municipality. The findings in the latest report on Free Choice from 2017 also indicate that parents move their children to a different school if the social climate in the class is bad (43%) and that only 9% change to a school that offers a specific profile such as language, science, arts or sports (Epinion, 2017)³.

² Parents have been able to choose to send their children to a private school, but prior to the 2005 School Choice Act, the municipalities would assign children residing within a precisely defined geographical district to each school.

³ This report does not consider in what grade the school move is made. Because most profile schools focus their thematic tracks to grade 7–9, the findings from this report might miss the nuances that help explain the school move, because they report an average of all students across grades and not specific for, e.g., grades 7th–9th.

Research in other countries has found that it is primarily resourceful middle-class parents who use the opportunity to choose educational programs (e.g., Lareau, 2011) for their children and benefit from the increased freedom of choice (Apple, 2001; Ferry, 2014). According to Apple (2001), middle-class families are attractive ‘customers’ to the schools because they are “*motivated parents with ‘able’ children*” (Apple, 2001, p. 413), and a school’s reputation and position might rely on appealing to and attracting this group (Ferry, 2014). In a case study of a Danish SportsSchool, Pedersen (2012) found that one reason for choosing some sports over others was to attract ethnic Danish students to a school with a high % of children with immigrant background, making the sports profile a means of gentrifying the school and an attractive approach to competing with the private schools.

As mentioned, the SportsClasses aspire to fulfilling two separate goals: on the one hand, to provide all talented athletes the opportunity to combine elite sports and education in a socially and societally sound manner and, on the other hand, to attain Team Danmark’s goal of “*more gold medals for Denmark* [my translation]” (Team Danmark & Kulturministeriet, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, these SportsClasses tap into the neoliberal-driven educational agendas that allow parents more autonomy in choosing schools for their children and cater to students with extraordinary talents – academically or in arts and sports.

2.2. RESEARCH IN TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN SPORTS AND DUAL CAREER

In the following paragraphs, I will account for the more established understandings about talent and talent development in sports and dual career (Storm, 2015). Because most research on talent development in sports and dual career has been conducted from a sport psychological perspective, I have chosen to include this research in my review. I do so to better account for the gap in the literature and to show what can be learned from a sports sociological perspective on talent development.

I start by describing three different approaches and understandings of talent and describing how talent has been investigated in these approaches. I then turn toward research into dual-career initiatives that combine elite sports and education before addressing the gaps in research by including research on sports participation and talent development from a sports sociological perspective.

2.2.1. BIOLOGICAL, TRAINING AND ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVES ON TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The global expansion of elite sports has sparked research into talent development and talent identification using different scientific approaches (Bailey et al., 2010) and has been recognized as a multidimensional process (Abbott, Button, Pepping, & Collins, 2005). *Talent development* entails providing athletes with the best possible conditions for accelerating their learning and performance and that will prepare them for becoming elite athletes (Abbott & Collins, 2004; Storm, 2015). *Talent identification* is closely related to talent development but refers to “*the process of recognizing and selecting players who show potential to excel at more advanced levels of competition*” (Cobley, Schorer, & Baker, 2012, p. 4). The purpose of the latter approach is to nurture the talent by focusing on and providing appropriate training similar to talent development (Storm, 2015). Talent development and talent identification are closely related, and talent identification can also be viewed as part of talent development because identification can occur at different stages during the talent development process (Sarmiento, Anguera, Pereria, & Araújo, 2018; Williams & Reilly, 2000).

Depending upon the approach to talent development, what constitutes *talent* might differ, and so will the recommendations for successful talent development. I will approach these different perspectives on talent development following other scholars such as Henriksen (2011) and Baker et al. (2012), who argue that talent can be defined from three perspectives: biological, psychological/ training and environmental. From the biological perspective, talent is defined genetically, as

something inherent (Bouchard, Malina, & Perusse, 1997), and the goal is to find the right sport for each individual and train the body accordingly. Bouchard and colleagues (1999) have also argued that an individual's response to training should be considered and that their response is related to their genetic makeup.

This approach focuses on anthropometrics as a means of determining whether an athlete will be successful. From this perspective, there is talk of 'talent spotting' based on how the athlete performs at a given time as an indicator of future performance (Abbott et al., 2005). From this perspective, having the right 'genetic makeup' is a key aspect of being 'talented' (Paish, 1998). However, most research has found limited empirical support for an approach that focuses so centrally on genetic makeup as the key to success (Bergeron et al., 2015; Lidor, Côté, & Hackfort, 2009). In some sports, genetic predispositions will be a contributing factor, such as handball and basketball, in which tall players are favored (Gil et al., 2014), but according to Abbott and Collins (2004), other perspectives should be considered to ensure a multidimensional understanding of talent development.

From the psychological/ training perspective, the role of genetics is not rejected, but the focus is on the right training (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2010). Talent is perceived as a set of competencies, acquired abilities and skills that enables athletic performance and excellence in a specific sport. Côté et al. (2007) introduced the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP) to describe pathways to elite sports. The model describes two main training trajectories that lead to elite sport performance: *elite performance through early specialization* and *elite performance through sampling*. Ericsson et al. (1993) argue that an athlete needs approximately 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become an expert in a given area. Deliberate practice refers to practices that are highly structured, goal-oriented and have a high degree of coach involvement (Côté, Baker, et al., 2007; Ericsson, 1996; Ericsson, Krampe, Tesch-romer, et al., 1993; Henriksen, 2011). Researchers have found a relationship between expertise and early engagement in sports in which the focus was on improving performance in a specific sport (Law, Côté, & Ericsson, 2007; Ward, Hodges, Starkes, & Williams, 2007). This approach has been debated

extensively because other research has found that specializing too early might lead talents to drop out due to overtraining injuries or burnout (Gullich & Emrich, 2014; Vaeyens, Güllich, Warr, & Philippaerts, 2009). Côté et al. (2007) promote the second trajectory, elite performance through sampling. This approach entails athletes gradually moving through sampling years (typically ages 6–12), specialization years (typically ages 13–15) and investment years (typically ages 16–). In this pathway, *deliberate play* is favored over deliberate practice. Deliberate play focuses on talent as the result of self-organized activities, involvement in several sports (also referred to as sampling) before specializing at a later age, and more focus on enjoyment and less focus on performance (Côté, Baker, et al., 2007). According to Côté et al. (2009), this approach is more likely to lead to success in the long term because the athlete is less likely to experience burnout compared with those focused on deliberate practice. Other researchers have argued that indeed these two pathways are both possible ways to succeed in elite sports, but a strong focus on developing an athlete's psychological skills is also required because it will help athletes interact with a talent development environment (Abbott & Collins, 2002; Macnamaram, Button, & Collins, 2010).

Most of the body of research on talent development from this perspective has focused on former or current elite sport athletes' roads to stardom (Elferink-Gemser et al., 2011). They have often used retrospective accounts of athletes' training activities during childhood, which introduces bias of recall (Ford, Hodges, & Williams, 2009).

Although this approach to understanding talent development has provided important information about different training approaches in talent development and the risks and benefits associated with the different approaches, the research is not sensitive to the context they have investigated. Storm (2015) argues that without understanding the club organization in which athletes are embedded, the applicability of generic talent development pathways is limited.

The above leads me to the third perspective – the *environmental* perspective. Studies from this perspective have been inspired by ecological theories such as

Bronfenbrenner (1979). The use of ecology refers to the relationship between context and individual (Rossing, 2018). From this perspective, talent has been defined as follows:

“A set of competences and skills developed on the basis of innate potential and of multi-year interactions with the environment – for example, training and competitions – and the ability to exploit the strengths and compensate for the weaknesses of the environment and to contribute to its [the talent’s] development” (Henriksen, 2010, p. 160).

Here, talent becomes a multidimensional concept in which anthropometric, psychological and sociological aspects all appear important. It is almost an ‘everything is important’ definition, which highlights a focus on the environment and what can be done for athletes to maximize their potential for success within a given context. An individual who is positioned in the right environment (e.g., club, family, and community) will therefore have better opportunities to succeed (Rossing, 2018). This approach focuses on the athlete’s interaction with the broad context by considering both relationships, in and outside of the sport context, and how they affect the talent development process. In studying generic aspects of effective talent-development environments, Martindale et al. (2007) identified five characteristics: 1) long-term aims and methods, 2) wide-ranging coherent messages and support, 3) emphasis on appropriate development instead of early success, 4) individualized and ongoing development and 5) integrated and systematic development (Martindale, Collins, & Abraham, 2007). Henriksen (2010, 2011) conducted case studies that found that proximal role models in training groups, a focus on developing psychosocial skills and a strong club culture were all important aspects of successful talent-development environments. In her case studies of successful handball clubs, Storm (2015) found that development pathways in sports are a nonlinear process influenced by the specific club culture and that key persons help shape and give meaning to talented athletes on their routes to elite sports.

Although these studies have contributed to a deeper understanding of the context's influence on talent development, these studies remain primarily focused on the sport-specific domain. However, with a growing focus on combined school and sports programs in sports policies, there is a need to widen the focus from the sport-specific domain. This need leads me to a description of what dual-career initiatives are and of the relatively new branch of research in talent development – dual career.

2.2.2. DUAL CAREER

As mentioned above, the increased focus on talent development and elite sports has led to the introduction of a variety of dual-career policy initiatives. For example, “The EU guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes” was launched in 2012 with the aims of providing athletes opportunities for dual careers and of encouraging EU countries to develop national guidelines for dual careers (EU Expert Group, 2012). The guidelines were supposed to help athletes maintain their sports, academic and/or vocational development (Henry, 2013; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014, 2015) and inspire clubs and sports federations to find the best possible means of helping talented athletes avoid having to choose between sports, education and work (Torregrosa, Ramis, Pallarés, Azócar, & Selva, 2015). The EU commission (2012) defined dual career as follows:

“the requirement for athletes to successfully initiate, develop and finalise an elite sporting career as part of a lifelong career, in combination with the pursuit of education and/or work and other domains which are of importance at different stages of life, such as taking up a role in society, ensuring a satisfactory income, [and] developing an identity and a partner relationship” (EU Expert Group, 2012, p. 6)

Dual career also refers to a branch of research on talent development that springs from a largely sport psychological perspective. This approach has developed during the last 10–15 years (Guidotti, Cortis, & Capranica, 2015; Wylleman et al., 2004).

The main focus of this research is the challenges athletes encounter when they combine elite sports with education in specific sports programs at high school and university level or work (Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015).

Wylleman and Lavalley (2004) introduced 'A Developmental Model on Transitions Faced by Athletes' and began referring to athletes as "complete persons." The model was inspired by a holistic life perspective that meant considering non-sport-related transitions (for example, from education to work) and their effect on the athletes' development (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004) at a time when most research in dual career was focused on transitions out of sports (Wylleman et al., 2004).

The model has since been reconstructed and renamed 'The holistic athletic career model' to consider four different levels: athletic, psychological, psychosocial and educational/occupational. These levels are divided into layers that account for the athlete's age when a transition typically occurs (Wylleman et al., 2004; Wylleman & Reints, 2010). According to this model, if an athlete can handle a transition within one level, doing so will positively influence the other levels. Studies that have applied the holistic athletic career model have shown how in developing so-called life skills, athletes reduce the risk of lifestyle illnesses, whereas other studies show that dual-career initiatives create increased risks of stress, injuries, and dropouts in school or in sports (Guidotti et al., 2015; Stambulova, Engström, Franck, Linnér, & Lindahl, 2015; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014; Wylleman & Reints, 2010). A survey study of 328 Italian athletes along with a systematic meta study of 49 research articles also found that student-athletes risk ignoring their social and educational development if they dedicate almost all of their time to sports (Guidotti et al., 2013, 2015). Studies in dual career have also found that many athletes have busy schedules (David, 2004), making it difficult for them to meet the expectations for student-athletes (Aquilina, 2013; Skrumbeltrang, Olesen, & Nielsen, 2016). In other studies, researchers have found that athletes in dual-career initiatives appear to do better academically than their peers do and attribute this difference to athletes'

well-developed self-regulatory skills (Jonker, Elferink-Gemser, & Visscher, 2009).

The mentioned studies focus on psychological or psychosocial aspects of dual career without considering social background and thus sociological perspectives. According to Stambulova et al. (2015), there is a need to investigate dual-career programs using approaches that account for more than the athletes' experiences and that are attentive to the socio-cultural context.

Scholars in sports sociology have shown, based on in-depth interviews with football coaches, that talent identification in soccer is a highly unarticulated process (Lund & Söderström, 2017). Coaches identify talents based on their own practical sense, taste in talent and understandings of what is required of a future elite soccer player at a given age (Christensen, 2009; Cushion & Jones, 2006; Lund & Söderström, 2017; Nash & Collins, 2006). Several sport sociological studies on sport participation show a strong relationship between social background, participation rates and choice of activity, with those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds participating more (e.g., Birchwood, Roberts and Pollock, 2008; Engström, 2008; Nielsen et al., 2012).

In a recent study of talented athletes in sports programs in Swedish high schools, researchers also found that the athletes were more likely to come from backgrounds with stronger educational and sporting capital backgrounds (Ferry & Lund, 2016). In a scoping review of potential sociological predictors of talent in junior-elite football, Reeves et al. (2018) found notable gaps in the literature that focuses on and examines sport-school programs and the influence of cultural and socioeconomic background. They argue that examining these gaps is needed to fully understand the complexity of talent development.

2.3. SUMMARY

Most of the research on talent development mentioned above focuses on former or current elite sport athletes' roads to stardom (Elferink-Gemser et al., 2011). The

research done on dual career springs from a sport-psychological body of research in which the focus is on how programs can help athletes develop *life skills* or experience less-problematic transitions into and out of elite sports (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015; Wylleman et al., 2004). This research predominantly relies on retrospective accounts and psychological studies to find the athletic precursors that made the athletes successful (Stambulova et al., 2009; Wylleman et al., 2004). The studies give limited attention to the social backgrounds of the athletes. Research done in school-and-sport programs predominantly focuses on the programs aimed at high school students (secondary school – 15 years and older) (e.g., Radtke and Coalter, 2007; Massey, 2010; Brown, 2015, 2016; van Rens, Elling and Reijgersberg, 2015; Ferry and Lund, 2016; Kristiansen and Houlihan, 2017).

This dissertation aims to add knowledge to the body of research on dual career by examining the social background of students enrolled in a dual-career initiative aimed at younger talented athletes in 7th–9th grade in lower secondary school (ages 13–15). Furthermore, by focusing on the talents in the making instead of athletes who have already succeeded, I intend to address the gap in the literature on talent development by examining the role social background might play for talented athletes as they prospectively navigate toward careers in elite sports.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical perspective of the dissertation. I propose a relational perspective (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) on talent development that enables me to investigate how students are selected for the SportsClasses, how the students in these classes experience the SportsClasses, and how these aspects are related to social background, type of sport, and gender. Immediately below, I provide an introduction to the constructivist structuralist approach (Bourdieu, 1999) from which I take my stance before I outline the concepts of field, capital and habitus in relation to talent development in SportsClasses and relate these to my research study.

3.1. STRUCTURING TALENT – A CONSTRUCTIVIST STRUCTURALIST APPROACH

To investigate how talent is defined by those selecting for the SportsClasses and understood by the students and their parents selected to the SportsClasses, I draw on Bourdieu's relational approach to research (Bourdieu, 2010). This approach focuses on relations between agents and objective relations that exist independently of an agent's awareness or will (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In other words, an individual or organization must be understood and defined in relation to other individuals or organizations and located in a position within a given field or social space (Bourdieu, 1997). Furthermore, this perspective aims to move beyond the use of social classes as simple classifications (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013, 1992). Instead, society should be viewed as reflecting a range of different, contested social spaces. Social spaces have social structures within which agents take different positions and differentiate themselves from one another based on their position within the social space (Bourdieu, 1997). Agents will position themselves differently

within a given social space based on the agents' habitus and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). (I will describe the role of different forms of capital in the SportsClasses in more detail later.)

This relational perspective emanates from an assumption that agents' social experiences are rooted in the structures within which they developed their understanding of the world. Underlying a relational perspective is an understanding that social phenomena are constructed based on earlier structures around which the agents construct their understanding of the social world (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996, pp. 23–24). In other words, who and what we are is not predetermined but is constructed and developed through life in relation to other agents and our surroundings. Bourdieu introduced the concepts of habitus and field as a conceptual mediation of the relationship between agent perceptions and formally constructed structures to help understand the complexity of social life (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Swartz, 1997). This approach can be described as structuralist constructivism or realistic constructivism, which means that the social world consists both of objective structures that operate regardless of the agents' knowledge and will and of socially constructed structures (Bourdieu, 1999; Järvinen, 2000).

Bourdieu argued that the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism misses the complexity of social life (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). He argued that a subjectivist approach that is focused on microlevel analyses of face-to-face interactions misses the link to larger societal patterns. Conversely, an objectivist analysis of social life results in uncritical recordings of statistical data, forgetting that individuals themselves help create the social world and the very categories that are reflected in the statistics (Swartz, 1997). I find that both sides offer important insights into social life and that by separating the objective and subjective, I would risk missing important aspects of social life. That is why I, in the way I constructed my field of research, combined an ethnographic study at one SportsSchool with a quantitative study conducted in 15 of (at the time) 23 elite sport municipalities to grasp the complexity and to make as adequate a scientific account of social life as possible. I will return to the description of my study design later in this chapter.

This relational approach allowed me to view the SportsClass students through a deeply contextualized lens of classifications such as gender, type of sport, and social background. I examined these classifications in relation to one another as they manifested themselves in the Danish sports field (Bourdieu, 2010). Thus, my focus was not the students, teachers, coaches, parents, school or clubs but the relations among these entities and how the definition of talent presented by those (in power) selecting talent shaped the SportsClass students' experiences of the classes. From a relational perspective, the SportsClass students' opportunities and aspirations in school and/or sports will be affected by how the students position themselves and others within the SportsClass field – a dual-dominated subfield in the Danish sports field in which school and sports overlap (Bourdieu, 1988; Ferry & Lund, 2016).

In the following section, I will present Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and forms of capital. I will also present Annette Lareau's further development of these concepts and relate them to the concept of talent. I will then explain the role these concepts played in my planning of my research design. I will especially focus on the concepts of capital and habitus because they provided a different frame for understanding the concept of talent from the one presented in the sport psychological research mentioned in Chapter 2.

3.2. SPORTSCLASSES AS A FIELD

Field is a concept used to define the social structure in which the habitus operates (Bourdieu, 2007). A field is not static; it changes over time due to the agents' struggle over power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Fields are structured spaces that reflect dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of capital available to agents (Swartz, 1997). The boundaries of a field are difficult to mark clearly, because agents and organizations in their fight for power will try to influence and gain access to different, occasionally overlapping fields. SportsClasses are an interesting example of how difficult it is to talk about a clear boundary

between two fields. In fact, one could argue that the reason SportsClasses were so contested when they were initially introduced was because the classes exist on the border of the field of sports and the field of education. When a Danish school culture, built on egalitarianism (Rasmussen, 2011), interacts with an elite sport culture, built on competition and hierarchy, the SportsClass field is contested in somewhat contradictory ways.

Bourdieu has used a metaphor of a card game to explain fields. In a card game and in a field, the participants all play to win a prize (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Depending upon the game or field, the rules will differ. The difference between the metaphor and fields is that the rules in a game of cards are explicit and known to those who play, whereas those who participate in a field do not necessarily know the rules.

Although fields are clearly sites of domination, they are also sites of resistance that, more often than not, reproduce the dominant logic (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). They are areas of struggle for legitimation. Therefore, fields are not open for everyone, because gatekeeping agents tend to limit the intake of new applicants. They do this to ensure that the newcomers have the same interests and values as those already in the field. In the SportsClasses, this gatekeeping is particularly evident because the entrance exam and the written application are means for those dominating the SportsClass field to grant access to those who display what is considered ‘talented’ or who have the desired forms and amount of capital and turn away those who do not (Christensen, 2009). With respect to school sports, it could be argued that because of the overlap between the field of education and field of sports, school sports or sports programs in school should be considered a dual-dominated field (Bourdieu, 1988; Ferry & Lund, 2016) in which values from school and sports are dominating. In this dissertation, I use the concept of fields to understand how the overlaps between the fields of sport and of education shape the students’ experiences and how this relates to the students’ positions in the fields.

3.3. CAPITAL AND HABITUS IN RELATION TO (SPORTS) TALENT

To understand how students are selected as talent, I have chosen to use the concepts of habitus and cultural capital as central to my analytical framework because these are related to the classifications used in my analyses. Thus, I will also discuss how gender can be considered a very powerful classifier (Krais, 2006).

In his work on forms of capital, Bourdieu describes talent in relation to academic achievement as *“the product of an investment of time and cultural capital”* (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). He relates talent to physical strength; it does not come overnight, but demands that the agent is goal-oriented and invests his or her time. This description points toward an understanding of talent as something that is nurtured and calls for a specific type of cultural capital that is embodied and closely related to a specific field. In relation to the SportsClasses, the question is then whether the cultural capital is more closely related to the field of sports, the field of education, or perhaps a little of both, making it a dual-dominated field (Ferry & Lund, 2016).

There are different types of capital (economic, cultural and social), all of which can be used to gain access to and influence in a given field. Economic capital refers to personal (and familial) income and property. Social capital is defined by the resources one can access through personal relations and networks, e.g., family, friends, and acquaintances. Cultural capital describes the relation between social background and the possibility of being successful in a field if you possess what can be considered legitimate knowledge, competencies and credentials within the field in question (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital comes in three different states: *embodied, objectified and institutionalized* (Bourdieu, 1986). The embodied state refers to the many different cultivated dispositions that are internalized in the agent through socialization. This state accounts for the understanding and appreciation of different types of tastes and cultural goods such as music, art and sports (Bourdieu, 2010). The second state, the objectified, refers to objects such as books, art,

instruments or sports equipment that demand certain cultural ability or knowledge to operate or use. The third state, the institutionalized, refers to the educational credential system. For parents, to invest in their children's education by choosing the right school or program is a means of investing in their future and providing them with better credentials and opportunities in the future because these credentials and opportunities have become essential to gain status in advanced societies (Lareau, 2011; Swartz, 1997). These three types of capital operate within given fields that have symbolic power, legitimating and valorizing certain types of capital and devaluing other types. This symbolic power derives from a fourth type of capital, symbolic capital, which legitimates the types of capital, resources, qualifications or attributes that have special meaning and value in a field (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). With symbolic capital, it is *"as if other capitals obtain a special symbolic effect when they gain symbolic recognition that masks their material and interested basis"* (Swartz, 1997, p. 92). An example of this symbolic capital in the SportsClasses could be belonging to a team or sports club that is highly regarded within the sports field or receiving a first professional contract.

In the card game metaphor mentioned earlier, the different types of capital represent a different value depending upon the game played, that is, the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). One type of capital might be the most important in one game, but in another, it might be almost worthless. What is considered a good hand in blackjack is not necessarily the same in a game of poker, but to know this, one must know the rules of the game (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). How you play your hand depends upon your *habitus*. I have briefly referred to *habitus* as the connecting link between agent and field that both structures and is structured by previous experiences. *Habitus* is a description of the values, norms, and cultural habits that a person depends upon when acting in the world. It is a 'structuring structure' that is influenced by socialization and family and peer groups. The *habitus* changes and develops over time as the agent meets new perspectives and attains new skills and forms of capital through schooling and interactions in different fields but is always

based on prior experiences, which is why Bourdieu emphasizes social reproduction rather than change (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Rasmussen, 2011).

3.3.1. HABITUS AND GENDER

According to Kraiss (2006), gender is one of the most powerful classifications and, following Bourdieu (2001), gender is fundamentally related to social reproduction and must be viewed in relation to habitus (Bourdieu, 2001). In this respect, the traditional dichotomy between male and female is manifested via the habitus; the *“symbolic order of gender is embodied in the individual’s habitus as a gendered view of the world”* (Kraiss, 2006, p. 121). The body is constructed as a biological reality that shapes what agents perceive as possible and impossible within a given social space. What is perceived as masculine and feminine is, of course, a social construction, but differentiation by gender is rarely perceived as such; it is considered a product of nature (Bourdieu, 2001; Thorpe, 2009). In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu shows how the division of labor between men and women is closely related to what Bourdieu calls symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001). Symbolic violence reproduces domination in the immediate interactions between people and is *“...the acting out of a worldview and social order anchored deeply in the habitus of both dominants and dominated”* (Kraiss, 2006, p. 122). The domination manifests itself in a variety of social contexts, ranging from assumptions about what women workers can or cannot do to limiting the distribution of men’s emotions to a narrow span. Following these understandings of gender, keeping women from participating in certain sports – or marginalizing them within sports (e.g., by focusing less on women’s teams or by paying women less to play sports) – can be understood as a method for the dominant gender, men, to maintain its powerful position vis-a-vis women in sports and in the larger society (Channon, Dashper, Fletcher, & Lake, 2016; Cooky, Messner, & Hextrum, 2013; Kane, 1995).

3.3.2. LEARNING TO ACTIVATE CAPITAL

Bourdieu's framework offers analytical tools to understand what sources of capital are relevant in examining how talent is socially constructed and performed in the SportsClasses. Because the SportsClass students are between the ages of 13 and 15, I have chosen to include the concepts of concerted cultivation and accomplishment of natural growth because these provide a framework for understanding how children learn to activate cultural capital (Lareau, 2011) and how these practices might be related to gaining access to the SportsClasses.

With theoretical inspiration from Bourdieu, the American sociologist Annette Lareau conducted research on inequality in children's leisure activities and school life base on their social backgrounds. Lareau found that parents from the middle and upper-middle class, often living in larger houses in suburbs, typically spent more time organizing and controlling their children's everyday lives to an extent much greater than did parents from working-class backgrounds. Furthermore, middle-class families spent more time organizing their lives around the children than did the working-class parents. Lareau calls this focused strategy of childrearing *concerted cultivation* (Lareau, 2011). Parents acted as chauffeurs to take their children to leisure activities that in many cases had been carefully chosen because each activity was perceived as giving their children competencies that would be useful for them in the future, such as performing under pressure, interacting with superiors, or working with others. As Lareau describes it, "*From the experience of concerted cultivation, they acquire skills that could be of value in the future when they enter the world of work*" (Lareau, 2011, p. 4).

Conversely, *accomplishment of natural growth* was most often used (unconsciously) by working-class parents. Children were less likely to participate in organized activities, particularly those organized by adults. Instead, they spent time on their own or with children living on the same street playing, without the interference of adults. The parents did not engage in extensive dialog or negotiations with children. Therefore, the working-class children did not obtain the same practice in negotiating

with and talking to adults as did the middleclass children. The working-class children showed more respect to those in authority and considered their surroundings as given rather than as something that they could affect or manipulate. This was particularly evident in school settings, in which working-class children did not ask as many questions or interact as much with teachers.

Lareau's study showed that middle-class children, because of the parents' concerted cultivation, were more independent, interacted more effectively with grown-ups and authorities in institutional settings and were used to navigating a busy schedule (even when they were tired) (Lareau, 2011). The effects of the middle-class parents' childrearing strategy also proved an advantage in school insofar as the interactions of students and teachers mirrored the style and patterns long practiced between children and parents. Lareau refers to the outcome of these different approaches to child rearing as leading to the "*transmission of differential advantages* to children" (Lareau, 2011, p. 5). By using concerted cultivation as a parenting strategy, middle-class parents taught their children how to maneuver across different fields, cultivating a particularly rich and flexible habitus.

3.4. SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concepts of field, habitus, forms of capital, concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth all serve as the analytical tools of this dissertation's analysis of how talent is selected, how students and parents experience the SportsClasses and how this is related to future aspirations in sports and/or education. The concept of field provides a frame for understanding the SportsClasses as a field in which struggles of dominance potentially are fought between values from the egalitarian public school and the competitive values from elite sports. Habitus is the connecting link that helps me understand the SportsClass students' future aspirations and experiences in relation to their position within the field of SportsClasses and how this relates to gender. Concerted cultivation and

accomplishment of natural growth are concepts that allow me to understand how an agent learns how to act in relation to a field. The different forms of capital provide a conceptual framework to analyze what talent is and different categorizations used to guide my empirical research. (I will return to this point in the next chapter.)

CHAPTER 4. METHODS

In this chapter, I will describe the study design, the methods used to collect the empirical data for my research, and how these methods relate to my theoretical framework. The aim of this dissertation is to understand how talent is practiced and what the wider social implications are. To accomplish this, I combined an ethnographic study design of a SportsClass in Denmark with two surveys of the SportsClass students.

The ethnographic study allowed me to investigate how SportsClass students positioned themselves within the SportsClass field and how social structures were maintained and reproduced (Ambrusius Madsen, 2003), whereas the statistical data from the surveys linked these individual-level accounts of social life to larger social structures (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

I chose to pursue an ethnographic study because this approach allows me to investigate how people's everyday lives unfold, how individuals or agents (consciously and unconsciously) position themselves within a given field, and how, through their interactions, social structures are maintained and reproduced in different social spaces (Ambrusius Madsen, 2003, p. 66). I very deliberately chose to conduct my study at a school in an area that I, as a former talent coach in badminton, had been part of but was no longer active in. Thus, I sought objectivity in the familiar but tried to make the familiar distant (Reed-Danahay, 2004). This process is often referred to as making the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Enguix, 2014). I will discuss how this influenced other choices in the research later in this chapter when I discuss my role as researcher.

The two surveys were conducted as part of the larger SportsClass project (Nielsen et al., 2017), and the online questionnaires were developed by Jens Christian Nielsen and Jesper Stilling Olesen in collaboration with Epinion. Epinion was also responsible for the data collection.

Table 2 provides a schedule and an overview of how the data used in this study were collected. In the following paragraphs, I start by describing the ethnographic study and how I selected and gained access to a school. I then describe how I conducted my observations and interviews along with the ethical considerations addressed in relation to the ethnographic study. The next section consists of a description of the survey study before I present reflections on my methodological choices and my role as researcher.

	2013	2014	2015
Survey 1	May–June		
Fieldwork 1	September–December: Observations: Class + parent teacher November–December: Student interviews – pairs		
Fieldwork 2		February: Tryouts: Soccer (Boys), Badminton, Handball, Swimming, Karate, Ice hockey May–June: Classroom observations June: 1 day all-day observation incl. parent interview x 3	
Fieldwork 3		November 2014–April 2015: Student interviews – individual January 2015: All-day observation incl. parent interview x 1	
Survey 2			May–June

Table 2: Outline of data collection

4.1. THE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

As mentioned above, I chose to conduct an ethnographic study to study a SportsClass. This approach uses a combination of qualitative methods such as interviews and observations, and, most importantly, the focus is on people's everyday lives as they unfold, are formed and are reformed in different social and cultural settings (Ambrusius Madsen, 2003, p. 66). Ambrusius Madsen (2003) describes an ethnographic method for conducting research in pedagogical contexts that is aimed toward physically, socially and culturally bounded fields. Attention is given to how individuals learn, by what means, and how this learning socializes and constructs individuals and/or groups of individuals (Ambrusius Madsen, 2003). According to Walford (2008b), ethnography is particularly well suited for studying educational settings because it focuses closely on the everyday detail of individual lives and how these details connect to wider social structures. Furthermore ethnography is able to describe *“the potential clash of cultures between the culture that a child inhabits outside school in family or peer groups and within school to which the child is expected to conform”* (Walford, 2008b, p. 8). I found this methodology to be an important tool in my study because this approach is able to describe how the sports field and the educational field will potentially influence the practice of talent in a dual-dominated field such as the SportsClasses.

As a methodology for studying educational contexts, ethnography provides an opportunity to gain insight into how individuals experience everyday life in schools. Therefore, ethnography has been used to shift the focus from officials' and teachers' views of students to the students themselves (Walford, 2008b). I chose to focus primarily on the students and their experiences of being talented athletes in a SportsClass, but as I will explain in the section about observation and interviewing, I also chose to include observations of and interviews with teachers, coaches, and families.

4.1.1. INITIAL ACCESS

A key element in doing ethnographic research is access to the research site (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Access, however, should not be thought of as something you gain once and for all. In other words, you do not have a full membership for life. Rather, membership can be described on an “incremental continuum” in which the researcher gradually moves from entering, e.g., a school, then entering a classroom, talking to teachers and students while developing a trusting relationship that allows the researcher to better understand the field (Walford, 2008b). In the following paragraphs, I will describe the measures taken in my study to select a site, gain access and cultivate relationships with the people in the project.

4.1.2. SITE SELECTION

According to Walford (2008), there should always be a distinction between site selection and access to a site (Walford, 2008a). When I designed my study early in 2013, I selected one specific school in Jutland as the site for my study because the school represented a strong site for the issue I wanted to investigate. The school had had SportsClasses since 2008 (Aalborg Kommune, n.d.). It had been close to closing down because of the school’s reputation as a problematic school with many pupils with immigrant backgrounds, but due to the introduction of SportsClasses, the school had managed to change that image. The SportsClasses made it possible to recruit a new student population. The school chose to recruit from all sports backgrounds and thus had excellent diversity with respect to sports.

This school was also part of a larger research project on SportsClasses in Denmark, in which it was one of four case schools in a multisite case study design. I joined the research team and carried out the case study at this school while simultaneously collecting data for my Ph.D. project. This arrangement meant that some of my fieldwork followed the same guidelines as the SportsSchool project. This was

primarily the case for the interview guides for student interviews, which the research team and I developed to meet the aims of the larger project as well as the aims of my specific project.

Having gained access to the school, the next step was obtaining access to a class. One of the two 8th grades in the school had experienced changes in the teaching staff; therefore, the principal suggested I interact with the class with the more stable staff because they would likely have more time to participate in the study.

4.1.3. OBSERVATION

The intentions with conducting observations were to investigate what occurs in real life and to make as accurate an account of real life as possible, knowing that I would be the filter through which the reality had to pass (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Wolcott, 1994).

I chose to conduct observations of the classroom and morning practice settings and all-day observations of four students (one day with each student). The observations provided opportunities to analyze how students practiced talent. I also spend some lunch breaks in the teachers' lounge observing and conducting semistructured interviews with teachers, coaches and elite-coordinators because I believed that, as social agents in the SportsClass field, they held important information on how talent was practiced.

In the beginning of the research project, I would arrange with the teachers when to visit, but we gradually developed an understanding that it was acceptable for me to just drop in. Initially, I only stayed around the class during one of the two long breaks and limited my interactions with the teachers to make clear to the students that I was not another teacher but merely an observer who wished to learn about the life in a SportsClass. During the other break, I would talk with the teachers. I would ask questions about the class and their perception of the SportsClasses compared

with other classes. The teachers would often ask me what I was seeking and if they could see my field notes. I would downplay the content of my field notes and allow them to see them if they wanted to. I informed the teachers that I was not ‘spying’ on them or the students but rather trying to determine what interested the students and how they interacted with each other.

When taking field notes during the classroom observations, I would usually be sitting up against the wall in the back of the classroom with my laptop or notebook, looking toward the front blackboard. I would register the subject being taught, students’ interactions, comments by teachers and students, and how the students were sitting. Like the teachers, some of the students were very keen on what I was doing. I would tell them that I was only observing what they were doing and writing it down. Occasionally they would ask whether they could see what I had written down, and I would let them. The typical responses were, *“yeah, that is right, I just said that”*, *“haha, she just wrote that you went to the bathroom (said to classmate)”* and some comment about how I was able to write without looking at my keyboard. After a few visits, they stopped asking to see my notes.

During recess and breaks, I did not take notes but would let the students ask me questions and even participate in conversations to minimize the distance between them and me. Maintaining a posture of always taking notes could increase the distance between us. These considerations are informed and inspired by studies in which researchers “hang out” with the respondents to create a relationship to build on (Hviid Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2001; Lareau, 2011).

When I conducted the all-day observations of the selected four students, I met the students either at home or at a bus or train stop on the mornings of days when they had morning practice. I observed the morning practices and conducted informal ethnographic interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Spradley, 1979) with the coaches. I waited outside the locker rooms, taking notes from the practice. When they were finished practicing, I either went by bike, bus or walked (the swimmers practiced within walking and cycling distance from the school) with them to school.

I observed the class as though it were any other day, sitting in the back of the class, but on these days, I paid more attention to the student I was following that day. After school, I did what the student would normally do. If practice was immediately after school, I traveled to practice using the same method they did, or if they had to go home prior to practice, I went with them. These days typically started at 7 am and ended at 11pm. I would spend 30 minutes writing down keywords from the day and spend the next day finishing writing up the field notes.

4.1.4. INTERVIEW

Interviews are often used in qualitative studies either as the sole method or, as in my study, in combination with observations. It is an often-used method in which the researcher uses an already prepared interview guide to support him/her in a search for insight into the lives of the respondents (Kvale, 1996). I also conducted ethnographic interviews spontaneously during fieldwork (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Spradley, 1979). I used a combination of both depending upon the purpose of the interview.

Interview situations often deviate from everyday life, because the conversation is constructed and often recorded on a Dictaphone, and the interviewer is interested not only in what the respondent says but also in the respondent him- or herself. During interviews, there is a risk of creating a type of symbolic violence, as Bourdieu calls it, in which the respondent is placed in a situation in which the interviewer has a stronger and more acknowledged linguistic mastery than does the respondent; thus, the two will have unequal access to the interview situation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996; Prieur, 2002). It is possible to reduce or neutralize the inequality in the interview situation if there is a direct or indirect relation to the respondents. In my study, this distance and inequality was based on age and educational level. I tried to diminish this by waiting to interview the students until three months into my fieldwork, hoping that they would have come to know me and be somewhat

comfortable around me. Furthermore, I would use my coaching background and knowledge about sports as a conversation starter. I would occasionally know badminton players from the same town in the same age group as the students in class and would ask the students if they knew these people. In using my own person and insights, I also moved away from a positivist approach in which data are to be sought and collected, moving instead in the direction of an approach that understands data as created – as part of the research process and in relation to the respondents, field, and researcher (Prieur, 2002).

I used semistructured interviews because this approach allows the interviewer to ask questions as topics arise and not in any specific order dictated by the interview guide (Kvale, 1996). This meant that the interview guide was considered a guideline rather than a recipe that had to be followed strictly. The interview guide ensured that I would cover certain topics in which I was interested. The interviews were semistructured to allow room for whatever wonderment might arise in different situations. In these situations, I would use my knowledge about and background in the field as a tool to guide the conversation. The interview guide was often informed by my theoretical framework or by the literature on dual career and talent development. The interview guide for students was created in collaboration with Jens Christian Nielsen and Jesper Stilling Olesen as part of the larger research project (see appendix E, F, H, I).

The first interviews were paired interviews in the 8th grade. Once again, I chose this approach to limit the level of inequality between respondents and me as interviewer while hoping that students would build on each other's answers. The couples were chosen in collaboration with the homeroom teacher, who helped me pair the students based on when they had entered the SportsClass (in 7th or 8th grade). At this time, some students would have been in the class for either more than 1 year or for only a couple of months. I preferred that the pairs consisted of students who had been in the class for an equal amount of time. Furthermore, I wanted to have girls with girls and boys with boys due to the gender skewedness of the class, and, if possible, I wanted to interview people playing the same sports. In cases in which this was not possible,

I wanted the pairs of students to consist of students who hung out together during recess. I asked all students whether they wanted to be interviewed⁴.

I interviewed the students again when they were in the 9th grade, this time individually. Again, I had to secure the teachers' permission and, because the students were now in the 9th grade, teachers were more reluctant to allow students time off to participate in the interviews because exams were approaching. I interviewed 20 students. The duration of these interviews was between 17 and 53 minutes, depending upon how much the student had to say⁵.

All student interviews were conducted during school hours and relied on the teachers' approval and students' agreement to skip class to do the interviews. The interviews were conducted in empty rooms or spaces close to the classrooms to avoid any major interruptions.

Interviews with teachers were conducted in the teachers' lounge when the teacher had a free period and the teachers' lounge was empty. The interviews with the elite coordinators were set in the elite coordinators' shared office, and the parent interviews were set in the home of the family. According to Kvale (1996), the location of an interview can influence the respondent, but in this study, I had to conduct the interviews during school hours because most of the students must leave the school immediately after school to catch a bus or to leave for practice, making after-school interviews impossible.

⁴ See the appendix for an overview of the pair combinations.

⁵ The longest interview was with a football player who did what he could to avoid returning to the math class he was missing due to the interview.

4.1.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In conducting the ethnographic fieldwork and reporting results from the research, I considered four key ethical aspects: variations of statements of consent, anonymity, confidentiality and privacy (Hviid Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2001).

Prior to the fieldwork's beginning, I had visited the class and handed out an information sheet for the parents and students informing them about the project and what to expect (see appendices A, B, C and D). This information constituted informed consent for my study (Hviid Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2001).

With respect to anonymity, I decided to change the names of my respondents, the school and the club. Ensuring full anonymity can be difficult, particularly in a study such as mine, in which the number of schools with this profile is limited. I decided to change the names of informants due to the delicate nature of a high-stakes environment such as elite sports.

My concerns about confidentiality are intimately related to how I administered my role as a researcher in the field. When conducting ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher must consider the risks that arise depending upon the level of participation by the researcher in the field (Hviid Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2001). Gold (1958) describes a continuum of researcher positions in the field ranging from complete observer to the observer functioning as a complete participant. The complete participant hides her true identity as researcher, whereas the observer stays at a distance and limits the involvement in the field. Both ends of the continuum present ethical pitfalls in the sense that one might have to 'betray' the confidence of the people in the field. With the complete participant approach, the respondents might feel betrayed when they realize that they have been used to gain information. For an observer, this risk of misinterpretation of the respondents' actions or statements is higher because of too little insight into the respondents' lives (Gold, 1958). I decided to use an approach that was in-between full observer and full participant, as is evident from my description of how I went about conducting the

fieldwork. I did not find myself in situations in which I felt that I was in a position in which I was violating any ethical codes (Hviid Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2001). I did conduct interviews during which some respondents would tell me in confidence that they had tried to drink beers at parties, but that this was not to be told to their coaches. Their actions were of course violations of the rules set by their coach but did not jeopardize anyone's personal safety. I kept the students' secrets from their coaches because I was given this information in confidence and because I had promised that I would not disclose it. Nevertheless, I decided to include it in the study because this violation said something about being a SportsClass student, an athlete, and a teenager, and including this information in the study did not violate the confidentiality between the respondent and me.

The last thing to consider according to Hviid Jacobsen and Kristiansen is privacy. Privacy played a large part in my fieldwork, and I touched upon this point earlier when I described how I went about my all-day observations. As mentioned earlier, I studied the families closely. Having dinner with a family and seeing strangers in their pajamas in the morning as they are preparing to leave the house did make me feel as though I was crossing the line, but I had made it my rule only to enter the house and have dinner with the family if I were invited in. I wanted the respondents to control how much of their lives they involved me in. One approach I used was to not ask to see the students' rooms but to let them dictate how much of their life they would invite me to see.

4.2. SURVEY – THE BIGGER PICTURE

The last part of my empirical material relies on two surveys of Danish SportsClass students throughout the country that were conducted in 2013 and 2015. Surveys are occasionally added to case studies to respond to concerns about the representativeness of case studies (Bell, 1993; Lareau, 2011; Wellington, 2000). Surveys have the benefit of being able to reach a larger group of people using fewer

resources than in, e.g., interview studies, but the two approaches also serve different goals and are suited for answering different types of question (Bell, 1993). I chose to incorporate the surveys because I wanted to triangulate this material with my ethnography. This choice allowed me to investigate how the population of SportsClass students constructs their aspirations and how this process relates to their choice of sport, gender, and social background. It allowed me to view the ‘big picture,’ as Lareau (2011) describes it.

4.2.1. SAMPLE AND OVERALL CONTENT OF THE SURVEYS

Data were gathered in 2013 from the full population of SportsClass students in 7th–9th grade (n=1170) in 15 Team Danmark-supported municipalities, and a follow-up survey was done in 2015 (n=636).

The surveys were part of the larger SportsClass project (Nielsen et al., 2017), and the online questionnaires were developed by Jens Christian Nielsen and Jesper Stilling Olesen in collaboration with Epinion⁶. Epinion was also responsible for the data collection. The surveys targeted registered SportsClass students and used social security numbers, which gave us the opportunity to link the survey responses to social background information such as the educational level of the students’ parents along with the parents’ occupation and income from Danish Statistics (Nielsen, Olesen, & Skrubbeltrang, 2017; Nielsen & Olesen, 2014).

In the two online surveys, the students were asked about their history of sports participation, their experience as SportsClass students, aspects of their everyday lives, and their aspirations. The first survey was a broad questionnaire consisting of 132 questions. Among other things, respondents were asked how they experienced the SportsClass program, the class environment, how much they practiced, how far

⁶ See Appendices J and K for an overview of the questions used for analyses relevant for this dissertation. For a full copy of the surveys, please contact Jens Christian Nielsen.

from the school they lived, and their athletic background. At the time of the second survey, many of the respondents had graduated from the SportsClasses, and the rest were graduating the year of the survey. Therefore, the second survey focused on how they had experienced the SportsClasses and what their aspirations in education and sports were. This survey consisted of 65 questions.

4.2.2. VARIABLES

I used gender, choice of sport, and social background as independent variables to guide my analyses of the survey material. Information about gender and social background was retrieved from Statistics Denmark based on the respondents' social security number, whereas the information about choice of sports was gathered from the surveys in which participants were asked to report what sport they played.

Initially, I wanted to isolate parents' educational, occupational, and income resources directly as measures of cultural and economic capital but, due to the relatively small number of cases, Statistics Denmark restricted the use of multiple background variables and multiple controls in certain analyses for fear of violating confidentiality. Instead, we used the same index for socioeconomic background as was used in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey (Adams & Wu, 2002; Ehmke & Siegle, 2005) as a combined measurement of cultural and economic capital (SES) (Nielsen & Olesen, 2014; Nielsen et al., 2017).

The following background information was retrieved from Statistics Denmark to calculate SES: International Standard Classification of Occupations as a measurement of parental occupation; and International Standard Classification of Education as a measurement of parental educational level, and parental income level (Adams & Wu, 2002). We constructed the three categories from this index, corresponding to the top quarter, the middle 50%, and the bottom quarter.

4.2.3. ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

As with most questionnaires, our surveys were designed to consist largely of questions with ‘forced choices’ and a few open-ended questions.

The statistical analyses in this study were driven by theoretically inspired and empirically informed hypotheses from my two other studies. We used cross tabulations to examine relationships among variables (Sproull, 2002). We chose to focus on the top 6 most popular sports and combine the remaining smaller sports into one group. We did this to create variables with enough n’s in order to be able to carry out the analyses. We ran frequency tests on all questions and, based on the results, we recoded the answers to some of the questions used in the third research product in this dissertation into three categories instead of 5. Again, we did this to ensure we had enough n’s to carry out our analyses.

We ran Chi-square tests on the cross-tabs to examine whether the relationships among the variables were statistically significant. A Chi-square test is based on a comparison of the observed frequencies in the collected data and the expected frequencies that would be present if there were no relationships among the variables (Jackson & Verberg, 2007).

4.3. METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

In the following sections, I will reflect upon some of the issues I experienced when conducting my research and the challenges of conducting research in a familiar field.

4.3.1. ISSUES WITH ACCESS

During my fieldwork, I experienced how the high-stakes nature of the SportsClasses also meant that I would not gain access to the entire selection process because the

elite coordinator wanted to safeguard applicants. This remains one of my greatest regrets in the study because I therefore would not be able to fully understand all aspects of the process. I was allowed to observe the practical part of the entrance exams, but not the part in which the experts discussed how talented each applicant was. This is of course a limitation. In my design, I tried to circumvent this by conducting ethnographic interviews as part of my observations, interviewing experts about what they considered talent to be and by interviewing elite coordinators and asking them about the process.

Another regret is related to my all-day observations. In the homes, I would let the students go to their rooms to do homework and let them have some privacy. In retrospect, I would have wanted to visit their rooms because doing so could have told me more about them as individuals and allowed me to ask different types of questions. None of them invited me in, and at the time, I believed it would be best to let them have a space that I did not enter, particularly when they did not invite me in of their own accord. In retrospect, my reticence might have been just as much about me not wanting to become too close for fear of entering their personal space.

The major limitation of the surveys was the sample size and the restrictions set by Statistics Denmark. I had hoped that I could have used parents' educational level as a measurement of cultural capital and their income level as a measurement of economic capital. However, because the sample size was not sufficiently large, we were not allowed to do this. That limitation also meant that we had to choose cross tabs over regression analysis and multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), the analytical approach favored by Bourdieu. Our analyses in the third paper might not have been as fine-grained as we hoped for, but by using cross tabulations, we remained able to show how students' aspirations and experiences were related to gender, social background, and choice of sport.

4.3.2. RESEARCHING MY OWN FIELD

When conducting ethnographic research, it is a truism that the researcher's biography influences the research and reasons for conducting the research (Lareau, 2011). Bourdieu argued that sociologists must be aware "*...that the specific characteristic of their point of view is to be a point of view on a point of view*" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 625). This concept is understood as stating the necessity of understanding that the 'truth' or point of view will be presented from the researcher's point of view, when interpreting the views of the research subjects by understanding them from the position of the particular athletes. Furthermore, the researcher must also interpret her interpretation in relation to the position from which it occurs. In many ways, what this approach becomes is a question of the researcher's own habitus and how it becomes an actual *point* of viewing (Bourdieu, 1999). To understand the point of view from which the researcher is collecting data, analyzing data, and presenting the results, the researcher must perform a so-called 'participant objectivation' meaning; "*...the objectivation, of the subject of objectivation, of the analyzing subject – in short, of the researcher herself*" (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 282).

As mentioned earlier, I had been working as a talent coach in badminton for years when I began the study. Therefore, my motivation for choosing this study was related to my personal insight from the field of badminton. I had experienced athletes being forced to choose between two sports disciplines at an early age because of an increase in training hours per week, and I had met ambitious parents searching for the best coaches and training environments for their children. All of these experiences were part of my habitus and were influential in affecting the choice of angles in the study.

My background as a badminton coach not only helped inform my choice of research angle but also posed a dilemma of proximity versus distance because I would be examining my own field. Examining one's own field is possible, but not without problems. At the time when I conducted my fieldwork, I felt that because I still had

contact with the elite badminton setting, I would have had to play the role of the researcher and the talent coach or club representative at the same time, because some of my players were considering applying for the SportsClasses. Of course, this might be considered a way in, but at the time, my involvement with one club in particular might also have influenced what I would obtain access to and how I would interpret what I did obtain access to. The worst-case scenario would be that the research would lose its focus because I would have had to spend too much time objectivating myself. I chose not to investigate my own field (badminton) directly, but because my research was set in an elite sport setting in a relatively small community, I remained very much a part of the field. I did use my background as a way in, but I chose to keep the field of badminton at arm's length by not interviewing badminton players.

Questioning the things you accept as 'natural' within a field can be difficult when you are so close to them that you have become blind to them. I experienced this during analyses and fieldwork when I discussed findings with my supervisors, and Jens Christian and Jesper when writing my research products and reports for the larger research project.

CHAPTER 5. PAPER SUMMERIES

In this chapter, I present summaries of my three papers. I will explain the connection between the papers, which part of the empirical material is used in each paper, how the theoretical framework was developed for each product and the findings from each paper.

5.1. PAPER 1: CONCERTED CULTIVATION VERSUS ACCOMPLISHMENT OF NATURAL GROWTH

5.1.1. AIM

The paper *Concerted cultivation versus accomplishment of Natural growth* has as its aim the investigation of which students are favored and for what reasons/based on which background. It addresses the cutthroat competition of entering and meeting the apparently contrasting demands of an elite sports school class – pass an entrance exam and be considered talented by experts based on individual performativity contrasted with the general and equality-orientated Danish ideals of comprehensive schooling, whose demands of performativity appear very different to those of the competition-oriented elite sports. In this, we (Annette Rasmussen and I) raise the following questions: *what constitutes talent performativity for students in an elite sports class, and how – by what strategies – have the particular relationships between sports and school performance been developed.*

The paper is structured around the analysis of these questions. The analysis focuses on competitive advantage in the context of SportsClasses and is centered on the entrance exams, competitive advantages and strategies of the students in relation to implications of performativity.

5.1.2. THEORY

In this paper, the overall theoretical framework of the dissertation is supplemented by performativity (Lyotard, 1984). *Performativity* refers to the constant move to improve *performance* relative to others in the same field with minimum input. Performativity in this respect follows an economic logic found in most spheres of society. In the case of talent development, this move means improving the performance of athletes and students by focusing on competitive advantage (Ball, 2013) to acquire or develop an attribute or combination of attributes that allows the agents to outperform their competitors. Performativity is in this paper applied as an analytical tool to understand the logic of the selection process for talent development. Forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and strategies of parenting (Lareau, 2011) are used as analytical tools to understand what constitutes competitive advantages in SportsClasses.

5.1.3. METHODS

We included empirical material conducted in the following contexts:

- entrance examinations (students, parents and experts)
- classroom observations – September 2013 to May 2014
- parent-teacher meeting observations in November 2013 and March 2014
- student interviews in pairs – 12 pairs⁷

In our analysis of ‘talent,’ we constructed four different strategies of performance that apply for the SportsClass students. We considered the two dimensions of the SportsClasses – school and sports performance. The strategies emerged from these dimensions, positioning the students as high or low performers in relation to school

⁷ I conducted 2 more couple interviews after the completion of this paper.

and sports performance. This matrix typology of the four student strategies allowed us to analyze what forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) each type drew on and how the type played his or her hand of capitals (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). In the SportsClass setting, different types of student were selected as ‘the best’ within in their field of sports and were thus by definition considered talented, regardless of whether their relative performance in sports was low or high.

High performer in both school and sports	High performer in school, low performer in sports
Low performer in both school and sports due to injuries	High performer in sports, low performer in school

Table 3: Typology of student performance strategies

5.1.4. CONCLUSION

We found that, in the context of a SportsClass, talent and student performativity constitute means for selection – inclusion and exclusion – of the students. Although it was emphasized during the entrance exams that talent was based on sports performance, admission ultimately depended upon a number of “dark horse” criteria (Ydesen, 2011), such as how many seats were available for which disciplines and for boys and girls. In this respect, how talent was practiced was related to gender *and* type of sports.

Gaining access to the SportsClass appeared to require a special type of cultural capital, *elite sports capital*, and this type of capital must be considered a high performing athlete. However, in a clash between elite sports and school values in the SportsClass field, elite sports capital did not itself provide a competitive advantage for becoming a high performing SportsClass student. We found that students with limited cultural capital but a strong elite sports capital, whose parents employed strategies of natural growth, tended to focus on sports rather than on both sports and

school. Students with both cultural capital and elite sports capital, and whose parents employed strategies of concerted cultivation, appeared to have a competitive advantage of living up to expectations in school.

We found that students and parents experienced expectations of SportsClass students that differed from expectations of students in a regular public school. There was an understanding among students and parents in this SportsClass that a SportsClass student could be asked to leave the SportsClass to make room for new students⁸. This is an indication that students and their parents experienced the economic logic of *performativity* and that the competitive nature of elite sports is clashing with the egalitarian values in the Danish public school system.

We found that, particularly among football players, elite sports capital and talent provided a competitive advantage because the larger football clubs can offer the most talented (male) football players a contract from the age of 15. If a football player signed a contract, he or she appeared to perform under less pressure than did those competing to remain on the team and in the SportsClass. Thus, students with a contract were able to remain focused on performing in school.

We found that elite sports capital could be a disadvantage if the students did not perform in both school and sports. Students that only obtained good results in sports experienced a lower status in the social hierarchy of the class. If a student performed in both school and sports, this allowed the student a higher social status in class, in which they appeared to be judged primarily according to the cultural capitals of the scholastic market (Bourdieu, 1997).

Because many of the students believed that if they did not perform well in sports, they would be asked to change school, being injured in the SportsClass potentially constituted a competitive advantage. An injury allowed a low performing athlete to

⁸ Students are not asked to leave the class if they stop playing sports or stop performing, but if they do stop, they must notify the elite sports coordinator and participate in a meeting to discuss their future in the SportsClass.

remain in the elite sports school class because they had a legitimate reason for not performing. Returning from an injury and having to perform at the same or even higher level after recovery appeared to be very stressful for the student, even when the student had a strong cultural and social capital in sports and school. We found that in cases in which the parents were active in exerting concerted cultivation, the student succeeded in keeping up his or her place in class but also that it came with risks of pain and pressure.

5.2. PAPER 2: MARGINALIZED GENDER, MARGINALIZED SPORT – AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SPORTSCCLASS STUDENTS’ FUTURE ASPIRATIONS IN ELITE SPORTS

5.2.1. AIM

In the second paper, I explored how the students experienced the SportsClass environment and how this related to their social background, gender and type of sport. As mentioned in chapter 2, the SportsClass program attempts to democratize access to talent development by choosing public schools to run SportsClasses. I was particularly interested in how different processes of marginalization played out in the context of a SportsClass. The findings from my first paper had shown not only that it was easier for girls to gain admission to the classes but also that the football players appeared to have an advantage. Furthermore, the results from the first report from the larger SportsClass project had found that when the students were asked about their dream job, *professional athlete* topped the boys’ list, but that particular career path was nowhere to be found on the girls’ list (Nielsen & Olesen, 2014, p. 123). This outcome led to the following research questions: *how do SportsClass students experience the SportsClass as contributing to their future aspirations and how is this related to their gender and the marginality of their sport?*

5.2.2. THEORY

To understand how the marginality of a sport influences the likely trajectories and aspirations of SportsClass students, in this paper, I supplement the overall theoretical framework of the dissertation and seek inspiration from Rosabeth Kanter's perspective on marginality and tokenism. Kanter argued that differences in patterns of mobility relate more to organizational structure than to the characteristics of individual men and women (Kanter, 1977, pp. 291–292).

Kanter's conceptual framework provided an analytical tool to understand female and male athletes' experience of blocked mobility or perceptions of limited opportunity in marginalized sports. Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field and habitus were applied in order to understand the centrality or marginality of different sports and to understand the how gender and marginality of a sport relate to the students' future aspirations.

5.2.3. METHODS

In this paper, I focus on all student and teacher interviews and classroom observations. To analyze how SportsClass students experience the SportsClass as contributing to their future aspirations and how this contribution is related to their gender and to the marginality of their sport, the SportsClass students were categorized according to their gender and type of sport.

I divided the analysis in two. The first part focuses on the social dynamics of the SportsClass, focusing on gender and sports using field notes and interviews with students and teachers. In the second part, I focused on the stories and experiences with the SportsClass of two students – a girl football player and a boy BMX rider. This approach enabled me to analyze how marginality manifested itself by gender (the girl) and by sport (BMX rider) and how it related to the SportsClasses as a frame for talent development.

5.2.4. CONCLUSION

The findings from the second paper suggested, that the marginality of one's gender and the marginality of one's sport could each independently contribute to the students' experiences of social life in the class, and their sense of what is possible for their future.

I found that type of sport and gender influenced the social life in the SportsClass. Because SportsClass students spent most of their leisure time practicing, the school in many ways was where they would meet people their own age, which left some groups more vulnerable when moving to the SportsClasses. Girls were outnumbered in this SportsClass, and for some of the girls who had started in the SportsClass the skewed group composition led them to leave the class only a few months into school year, because they missed their female friends.

I found the social life in the class to be structured around the type of sports the students played in the class. Depending on the type of sport a student played, this provided that student with different amount of social capital. Football outnumbered the other sports, which meant that being a football player, as apposed to being a token BMX rider, created better opportunities to access the social life in the class. The football players in the SportsClass knew each other from the football club, because they played on the same team. In 8th grade the group of football players had become the dominant group that unintentionally kept those of their classmates who played other more marginalized sports out of their group by always playing games or discussion things related to their football practice.

The experiences of the two students, Pernille the football girl and Tom the BMX rider, also showed, that the structure of opportunity for a career in sports and especially the students' experiences of opportunity depended on how many of a 'kind' of a sport there was in the class, as this seemed to be important in creating morning practices. The more dominant or popular the sport, the greater the numbers, and the greater the likelihood of a sport-specific morning practice. From the

accounts of the two students in this paper it was evident, that the general morning practices, that focused more on strength and conditioning, did not provide them with better opportunities. Tom spoke positively about the morning practice and becoming more fit. However, he ended up experiencing the SportsClass-program as restrictive, because the long school days made it difficult to make the afternoon practices in his club and ultimately to pursue his sport. This was in strong contrast to the ice hockey and football players in the program who treasured the morning practices, for them sport specific, because it gave them the opportunity to improve their technical skills.

Findings from this paper also showed a clear division between football played by boys in the SportsClass and football played by girls in the SportsClass that negatively affected the token football girl Pernille's perception of a future in sports.

5.3. PAPER 3: REPRODUCTION AND OPPORTUNITY: A STUDY OF DUAL CAREER, ASPIRATIONS AND ELITE SPORTS IN DANISH SPORTSCLASSES

5.3.1. AIM

The third and last paper in this dissertation zoomed out and examined the larger picture of SportsClasses in Denmark. This paper's research questions and aim were informed by the findings of the two previous papers. From the first paper, I learned that parents' engagement in the SportsClasses appeared to constitute a competitive advantage for the SportsClass students, along with parents' elite sports capital. The second paper's focus on gender and type of sport was also present in this third paper. Informed by my previous studies and inspired by sociological research focused on how high stakes, specialized school programs cater to middle-class families (Apple, 2001; Ferry, 2014; Lareau & Weininger, 2003), we (Jens Christian Nielsen, Jesper Stilling Olsen, David Karen and I) asked, 1. *What are the social backgrounds of the athletes who got into the SportsClasses*; 2. *How are gender, social background and*

choice of sport related to the students' experience of the SportsClasses; and 3. how do these variables relate to their future aspirations in school and sports?

5.3.2. METHODS

In this paper, I rely on the two surveys from the SportsClass project of which I was a part. The first survey was conducted in 2013, the second in 2015. Data were gathered from all SportsClass students in 7th–9th grade (n=1170) in 15 Team Danmark-supported municipalities. We received permission (with constraints) to link student IDs to information on students' parents' education, occupation, and income from Statistics Denmark (Nielsen, Olesen, & Skrubbeltrang, 2017; Nielsen & Olesen, 2014).

Of the 1170 SportsClass students, 1010 (86.3%) answered the first survey and 632 answered the second survey. A total of 577 students answered both surveys^{9,10}.

We ran Chi-square tests on the cross-tabs to examine whether the variations among the independent variables were statistically significant. A Chi-square test is based on a comparison of the observed frequencies in the collected data and the expected frequencies that would be present if there were no differences among the different independent variables (Jackson & Verberg, 2007).

⁹ The response rate in both surveys for boys and girls was the same. In the second survey, the response rates for football players were slightly lower than for the other sports compared with the first survey. In addition, those with higher academic achievement and orientation in the first survey had a higher response rate in the second survey than did those who were more focused on elite sports.

¹⁰ For those analyses related to socioeconomic background, n equals 631. The missing respondent is omitted because of missing social security number information because this student was not a Danish citizen.

5.3.3. THEORY

This paper followed the main theoretical framework of the dissertation, because the Bourdieusian approach placed issues of reproduction and opportunity at its center (Bourdieu, 2010). Habitus, capital, and field substantially guided our analysis of the students selected for the SportsClasses and their experiences and allowed us to focus on the patterns of reproduction and opportunity that might occur at this early stage of athletes' incipient "careers."

We considered Danish elite sports as a field in which youth athletes compete for access to sports clubs and, since 2005, to SportsClasses. The SportsClass students apply for access to this (sub-) field in specific sports; the sports themselves are stratified and located in more and less powerful positions within the elite sports field. The competition for access to the SportsClasses is the subfield in which the student-athletes vie for status and distinction (Bourdieu, 1986).

Based on studies showing that children of parents with high educational or cultural capital are more likely to send their children to specialized school programs (Apple, 2001; Lareau & Weininger, 2003), we expected to find that SportsClass students were disproportionately from homes with higher cultural capital. We also expected that students with parents who had elite sport experience might be advantaged by a specific type of cultural capital.

5.3.4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggested that students' habitus reflected how the class structure intersected with educational and athletic opportunity. The observed relationship between class background and gaining access and matriculation to SportsClasses was a function of how families with different types and amounts of capital relate to the educational system and to special programs offered through the schools. We found that social background was not a significant factor in how students

experienced the SportsClasses, but social class background *was* a significant factor in the participants' future aspirations. All students, regardless of social background, believed that SportsClasses provided better opportunities to pursue a career in sports; however, close to 2/3 of the girls reported that they had experienced loss of motivation and injuries during their time in the SportsClasses.

We found that students in the SportsClasses tended to come from high- and middle-SES backgrounds and that students with parents with elite sports backgrounds constituted fully one-half of the students in the SportsClasses. Having parents with elite sports backgrounds did not significantly affect the orientation toward aspirations in elite sports as much as gender, type of sport and social background did. In sports with established national and international leagues such as football, handball and ice hockey, the responses to future aspirations appeared to indicate a perception of a more open structure of opportunity – particularly for male athletes. In comparison, the opportunity for athletic success might be perceived as more limited for students from smaller and less popular sports, which might explain why this group – along with the girls in the study – was more focused on future academic achievement. Interestingly, ice hockey players, who were disproportionately from lower-class backgrounds, appeared to perceived great opportunities in a career in sports and were more invested in sports.

The results of this third study suggested that when combining education and sports in a dual-career setting, the risks are that the athletes that need the most support to combine education and sports might not even enter the classes because the application process keeps them from even applying. Additionally, those who might benefit from a stronger focus on sports due to their social background or gender end up focusing even more on education.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

In this section, I will discuss the themes that emerged from my investigation of the research questions. I have structured the discussion in accordance with the three stages of the SportsClass program and following my three subresearch questions: 1) *How are students selected for the SportsClasses?* 2) *How do SportsClass students experience the SportsClass, and how does this relate to their social background, type of sport and gender?* 3) *Given their social background, gender, and type of sport, how do SportsClass students construct their aspirations in sports and education?*

In each of these three stages, I will show how the theoretical perspective and empirical findings from my three papers contribute to a sports sociological understanding of talent development and dual-career initiatives such as the SportsClasses.

6.1. PERFORMING AND SELECTING TALENT

In this section, I start by describing how the SportsClass entrance exams do indeed appear to follow the understanding that talent is a multifaceted concept, as it is often described in sports psychological research, and that, during the selection process, officials do their best to avoid favoring some over others in a seemingly objective and meritocratic selection of talent. I will then discuss my findings across my papers and discuss how selecting talent using this approach might result in reproducing existing structures of opportunities for those from middle-class backgrounds.

The organization of the entrance exams, with experts from the field selecting who ‘has it’ and who does not, can be understood as the field being defined by the experts with the power to populate the field in accordance with their interests, in this case selecting athletes who are able to display what I referred to in the first paper as

strong elite sport capital. This capital should be considered an embodied cultural capital within that specific field (Bourdieu, 1986). The paper showed how applicants were asked to demonstrate their skills – their sports capital/ embodied cultural capital – during the entrance exams. The process suggests that the experts’ “*eye for talent*”, as Krogh Christensen argued, is what determines what talent is (Christensen, 2009) and in turn what comes to define the field. Similar to Christensen (2009), Lund and Söderström (2017) found that talent identification was strongly related to the coaches’ practical sense and taste in talent, but they argue that the practical sense is far from universal. Consistent with Lund and Söderström (2017), my findings from paper 1 showed that the practical sense of talent is informed by the coaching context in which coaches learn to identify talent in a specific way. This situation leads to a favoring of athletes who have been most exposed to athletic cultivation in organized sports and in the clubs in charge of the entrance exams. The cultural arbitrary of the coaches doing the selecting aligns quite well with the coaches in the sports clubs who have trained the applicants for the SportsClasses. Relatively new athletes (particularly from families without elite athlete parents) might therefore struggle to be able to display the ‘right’ type of or sufficient cultural capital to be identified as talent.

In practice, however, it appeared that talent or the performance of a particular type of cultural capital within a certain sport and anthropometrics were not the sole determinants in obtaining access to the SportsClass. The limited ‘spots’ in the SportsClass in the school I investigated meant that access was related to the types of sports people played and the gender composition of the applicants. The many applicants for more popular sports such as football and particularly among boys meant that it was more difficult to gain access as a male football player than it was for, e.g., a female swimmer. If there were many applicants from one sport, those deciding whom to select must consider gender composition and types of sports to create a well-functioning class environment in the school (see paper 1). Thus, my findings suggest that timing and number of applicants become as much a part of the selection process as merits and display of embodied capital. Factors such as type of

sport and gender can be as much of a defining factor as display of embodied cultural capital. This point exemplifies how the sports field and the educational field become intertwined and indicates that the SportsClass field is a so-called dual-dominated field (Ferry & Lund, 2016) in which school and sports each have a say in who is accepted. Other studies have also found that considerations other than merits enter the selection process in programs based on policy (Frank, 2016; Karabel, 2005; Karen, 1990). They found that interests are built into the fields and organizations that will implement the policies and produce the outcomes.

When I combine the findings from my first study concerning the application and selection process just described with the findings from the third paper that describe the social background of the SportsClass students, I find that social, cultural and, in some sports, economic capital appear to be important factors in gaining access to the SportsClasses. The results from my third paper concerning the distribution of the students' social background raise a question of whether unintended or informal selection processes occur in the sports clubs prior to the entrance exams, resulting in a distribution that is skewed toward those of middle and high socioeconomic backgrounds. The unintended selection can occur long before they apply for the SportsClass and could relate to the resources needed to participate in organized sports and, even more so, in competitive sports. For example, in these activities, parents' involvement is necessary if a child must be driven to competitions and practices. Given this requirement, some athletes and families might opt out because they cannot participate in the needed activities. Furthermore, this selection process can become even more skewed toward applicants from middle-class families when school and sports are combined, because this combination creates a setting that caters to middle-class families with the means to discover and then send their children to specialized schools, following tendencies found in educational research studies (Apple, 2001; Ball, 2003, 2017; Blomqvist, 2004; Ferry, 2014; Lareau, 2011).

My first and third articles indicate that to grasp the complexity of how talent is practiced and developed, it is necessary to broaden our understanding of family

support from the type of support given by parents and to focus on how this support relates to the types of capital available to the parents. Other researchers have argued the importance of parents' engagement in their children's sports activities and types of engagement in relation to talent development (e.g., Côté, 1999). In general, parental involvement is considered an important part of the environment surrounding talented athletes (Henriksen, 2010). These findings spring from sport psychological research and have not considered how a family's ability to provide the needed support might be influenced by the different resources and forms of capital accessible to the family. However, the findings from my first paper suggested that in cases of injuries, club changes and in navigating the SportsClasses, parents' cultural and social capital in sports or in elite sports could provide students with a competitive advantage and thus play a role in talent development – not only in how talent is defined but also in which potential athletes have the opportunity and conditions to develop and acquire the needed cultural capital in elite sports.

Sociological studies in sports participation have found that more children from middle and high socioeconomic backgrounds participate in organized sports (e.g., Birchwood, Roberts and Pollock, 2008; Engström, 2008; Nielsen et al., 2012). This finding might help explain why middle- and upper-middle-class children are overrepresented in the SportsClasses, a tendency also found in Swedish SportsClasses in upper secondary school (Ferry & Lund, 2016). Because club sports attract more children from middle- and high-SES backgrounds and because programs such as these tend to cater to middle-class families, applicants for a program with ties to club sports are more likely to come from these backgrounds. In other words, due to how sports and social background relate to one another, although experts and coaches try to focus solely on sports-specific talent, the selection process for talent development programs such as the SportsClasses might end up favoring applicants from middle- and high-SES backgrounds.

These findings suggest therefore that 1) the selection of talent is not entirely based on athletic merits and that the selection process might not be occurring in as “*socially and societally*” sound a manner as the Elite Sports Law intends, and 2)

who is selected for the SportsClasses is also influenced by the nature of the applicant pool and the informal selection that has occurred prior to the application for the SportsClass.

6.2. BEING INCLUDED IN THE SPORTSCCLASS

In this section, I will discuss the students' experiences with the SportsClasses. I will focus on the two external factors that I found throughout my three papers had the greatest influence on the SportsClass experience: risk of becoming or being injured (papers 1 and 3) and the experiences with the classroom context in relation to gender and type of sport (papers 1 and 2).

6.2.1. INJURIES AS PART OF THE SPORTSCCLASS EXPERIENCE

In the following, I will start by discussing my findings on injuries in relation to the Act on Elite Sports and the purpose of the SportsClasses. I will then discuss how injuries can be understood in relation to research on talent development approaches. Finally, I will discuss how students within SportsClasses were differentially affected by injuries and how their social backgrounds affected how they address injuries.

As described in chapter 2, the SportsClass program is supposed to provide all talented young athletes with opportunities to combine their aspirations in sports with the opportunity to obtain an education. This dual goal was instituted so that talent development in Denmark occurs in a socially sound manner; it is focused on maximizing young athletes' physical, psychological and social development without a one-dimensional focus on sports (which, at the very least, risks overtraining injuries). The findings from the first and third paper indicate that the SportsClass students struggle with their physical and athletic development due to injuries.

Based on my findings, I would argue that the SportsClass program risks pushing athletes toward an early specialization; by being selected as talents based on their display of embodied capital at the age of 12, applicants must specialize earlier to be selected for the SportsClasses. Côté and colleagues found that early specialization might lead to burnout and increased injuries among young athletes, the consequence being that the athletes stop playing sports (Côté, Barker, & Abernethy, 2007). I found that the extra hours of training provided in the SportsClasses, along with increased focus on performance in clubs, can lead to burnout and injuries among athletes, as several studies have also found (e.g., Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2003; Wiersma, 2000).

I found that, to a large percentage of students, being injured was a large part of what it meant to be a SportsClass student. In fact, the results from my third paper showed that 61% of girls and 40% of boys felt that they had pushed themselves so much that they had become injured. During my interviews and visits to the school, I also learned that being injured was something many of the students had had to struggle with and something they always brought up when considering their possible future aspirations in sports. This finding raises questions about the effectiveness of the Elite Sports policy; although the policy allows for earlier identification of talent and earlier specialization and training, it might also undermine the young athletes' motivation because of injuries and possible burnout.

Just as selection for SportsClasses must be viewed in a larger social context, so, too, do injuries. I found that three sets of agents appear to be important in navigating the situation of being injured: coaches/teachers, students, and parents. Aside from being a setback in his or her sporting life, an athlete's injury was considered quite differently depending upon how coaches viewed the athlete's potential. If a student with high cultural capital in sports and who was believed to have a bright future in sports was injured, it appeared that their position in the SportsClass was not questioned and coaches would do what they could to accommodate the needs of this student. If a student who was not believed by the coaches to have high potential was injured, it appeared that this student was at higher risk of having their status and

position in the SportsClass threatened. In paper 1, I introduced Lyotard's concept of performativity as a means of understanding the economic logic behind the improvement of athletes found in talent development. In this conceptualization, performativity is a question of maximizing outputs while minimizing inputs in the most efficient way (Lyotard, 1984; Skrumbeltrang & Rasmussen, 2014). Therefore, coaches' actions to support athletes with highly conceived potential as opposed to students with low conceived potential might reflect the coaches' interests in protecting their investment in a student. With respect to injuries, a student's return to the team (and ability to be selected initially) is thus affected by how much time the coaches must spend on the athlete.

As findings from paper 1 showed, if a student was injured, students and parents consequently occasionally feared being removed from the program or at least being called into an interview with the elite coordinator and a teacher to discuss whether the student should stay in the class or move to a different class or school. To students, injuries can be considered an important transition; in Wylleman and Lavellee's (2004) Holistic Athlete career model, injuries are referred to as non-normative transitions. Non-normative transitions are difficult to predict and to overcome, and the athlete must be able to use/develop the necessary resources to adjust to these new transitions (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Küttel, 2017). An injury could therefore mean a transition out of the SportsClasses in addition to having to deal with the injury. I explain in paper 1 that the resources required to overcome challenges such as injuries were also related to how the SportsClass students had learned to activate their cultural and social capital and how their parents collaborated with the school.

In case of injuries, parents played a large role in how the situation was handled. In the two examples documented in paper 1, Gustav and Mathilde's parents had high cultural capital but different levels of elite sports capital. Both sets of parents decided to keep their child's injury a secret from the teachers and the elite sports coordinator to maintain the child's place in the SportsClass. Gustav's parents, with elite sport capital, had used their social capital in the field of football by reaching out

to the leading knee expert used by professional soccer players. In contrast, Mathilde's parents, who did not have elite sports capital, explained how their lack of knowledge about sports had meant that the nature of their child's injury had gone undiagnosed for close to 8 months. Both sets of parents kept their child's injury a secret to ensure that their child stayed in the SportsClass, but being able to activate cultural capital specific to the field of their child's sport provided Gustav with better opportunities to overcome his injury. These findings suggest that family resources such as cultural and/or social capital shape how injuries are handled and can have implications for the students' future athletic careers.

6.2.2. EXPERIENCES WITH THE CLASSROOM CONTEXT

Based on my studies, I found that students' experiences with respect to social life and opportunities provided in the SportsClasses were related to their amount and display of cultural capital, type of sport and gender. In this section, I discuss my findings in relation to the effects of classroom context.

As noted in the first paper, because the SportsClass field is jointly constituted by education and sports, the SportsClass students needed to perform on the field *and* in school to distinguish themselves. This competitive situation defined the classroom context and favored those who were able to compete both on and off the pitch – and who were able to activate and perform the relevant cultural capital in the classroom and on the pitch. In studying the role sports play in the social hierarchy among boys in school classes (ages 10–11), Swain (2003, 2006) found that the boys' position in the peer group was determined by a range of social, cultural, physical (e.g., sports and toughness) and economic resources that they were able to access as they attempted to establish relationships in their everyday lives. He found that being good at sports was the most effective method of gaining popularity among the male peer group and that soccer was the most important. In my study, every student was good at sports. To the best of my knowledge, the social relations in such a class have not

yet been investigated; interestingly, however, I did find similar patterns to support the importance of a specific type of sport.

In my second paper, I argued that an athlete's sport becomes a source of social capital and provides entrée to the SportsClass' social life, depending upon the popularity and centrality of the sport in the class. For students' experiences in class, boys in popular sports appeared to flourish socially with greater ease. Football players in particular appeared to be included in the social world of the class, because type of sport gave them an immediate, inviting social network, much like Swain (2003, 2006) found. That some types of sports are more popular follows Tomlinson, Markovits, and Young's (2010) argument that the sports field is a contested cultural territory in which some sports become part of an established culture and are reproduced within that culture. In my second article, I showed that the hierarchy in the field of sports in Denmark in which football is the most popular sport was reproduced in the SportsClass field, in which specifically the male athletes from the more popular sports received sport-specific morning practices. Bourdieu (2001) argued that highly valued activities such as sports are enhanced when practiced by men and are often perceived as inferior when performed by women. My studies did not show directly that this proposition was true, but how the morning practices were organized did indicate a clear division between football played by boys in the SportsClass and football played by girls in the SportsClass. The female football player felt that she was being excluded from the football morning practice because she was the only girl. This perception appeared to negatively overshadow her experience of the SportsClasses in terms of contributing to her future aspirations in sports, although her overall amount of practice time had increased. The findings from my third paper (Table 4 in the article) showed similar tendencies in the responses to how students had felt that they had become better at their sport because of the morning practices. Forty-three percent of boys compared with 33% of girls responded that they had to a great extent become better at their sport by having morning practices. With respect to type of sport, this relationship was significant and

showed that 17% from ‘other sports’ responded that they did not improve by having morning practices¹¹.

There was an interesting interaction between gender and type of sport. In terms of selection, girls appeared advantaged because fewer girls than boys applied, as shown in paper 1. What could be considered an advantage in gaining entry (being among the few) became a challenge within the class and vice versa. Two of the four girls who started in the SportsClass in 7th grade left the class after a few months because they missed their old friends, and one of the other girls in the class said that she missed having more girls in the class. As noted in the second paper, group composition can play a role in how girls, in these highly gender-skewed groups, tended to feel marginalized and seek elsewhere to find more girls to socialize with. A similar pattern was found among boys in the less popular sports, or what in that paper referred to as the marginalized sports. This finding implied that type of sport and gender were important factors with respect to how well a student was included in the social life of the class. The football boys had a more difficult road into the SportsClass because they were competing against more applicants, but within the class, it appeared they constituted themselves as a relatively cohesive and mutually supportive group. In the second paper, I found that when new students entered the SportsClass in 8th and 9th grade, type of sport appeared to be a part of how easily the new students were integrated into the class. In my second article, I also found that, because the athletes spent so much of their leisure time practicing, they only had limited time to be with family and friends outside of their sport. For the athletes from less popular sports, this effect could result in a relatively isolated social life which other studies have also found (Quinto Romani, 2018). They had minimal social capital development in school because of the lack of sports mates and, because they spent much of their leisure time on their sport, they had limited time to develop friendships outside the SportsClass.

¹¹ 17% of swimmers also responded that they did not improve by having morning practices. However, most swimmers already had morning practices before entering the SportsClasses; thus, they might not have considered the morning practices additional training.

6.3. CONSTRUCTING ASPIRATIONS

In this section, I discuss how I found across my three papers that the students' aspirations in school and sports were formed by their habitus – determined largely by their social background and the different forms and amounts of capital that allowed the SportsClass students to navigate school and sports. Their relative position in the dual-dominated SportsClass field led them to assess their perception of their possibilities for the future in school and/ or sports. In the surveys used in the third paper, the students were asked how they would prioritize sports and education in the next five years. We found that there was a significant relationship between type of sport, gender and the students' aspirations. In the second paper, I found that the marginalization experienced in the SportsClasses was tied to a feeling of marginalization in the field of sports that led these athletes to abandon their aspirations in sports because in their mind, it was 'unrealistic' to make a living at their sport. The findings from the third paper also indicated that aspirations in sports and/or education were related to the students' gender, social background and type of sport. My findings indicate that we must consider athletes' gender, type of sport and social background to understand aspirations in elite sports because these traits relate to the perception of the opportunity structure within sports and within the larger occupational structure. Similar findings have been made by De Bosscher and colleagues (2015) in their study of successful elite sports policies. They found large differences in the income structure of athletes both across and within given sports and that given these differences in income structure, the need to combine sports and education differed depending upon the type of sport. My findings are consistent with research indicating that student aspirations in education are constructed based on their habitus (Dumais, 2002; Reay, 1998, 2004) and that involvement in sports is related to social background (Eitle & Eitle, 2012; Haycock & Smith, 2014; Pot, Verbeek, van der Zwan, & van Hilvoorde, 2016; Reay, 1998; Stuij, 2015).

The relationship between social class and type of sport is not a new finding (e.g., Bourdieu, 2010; Scheerder, Vanreusel, Taks, & Renson, 2002; Stuij, 2015; Warde, 2006). However, in relation to elite sports, aspirations toward a career in sports and

the perceived opportunity structure, it is interesting that it appeared that students from higher social backgrounds appeared to seek more niche-type sports, with a limited opportunity structure, compared with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who appeared to seek sports with more opportunities for a professional career such as football and ice hockey. Therefore, the perceived need for and commitment to an education and later a nonathletic career was more evident for students from higher SES backgrounds who played niche sports than for those in the popular sports, to whom education might even be an obstacle for the training. This pattern of emphasizing education was also true for most girls in the SportsClass¹², which might explain why only 2% of the girls planned to pursue a professional career in sports. The findings from my second paper indicated that the girls also based their choice concerning staying in sports on the potential future in the sports, which the girls experienced as more limited, particularly compared with the football boys. In educational research, there have been examples of students who believe they will fail and thus ‘choose’ to do poorly or drop out instead (Reed-Danahay, 2004; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Willis, 1977). The decline in aspirations among girls could also be related to perceived opportunity (or lack thereof) for the female athletes; they perceive that they have no future and choose to drop out of sports and focus on education instead.

For the SportsClass program, these relationships between type of sport, social background and aspirations indicate an unintended consequence from how students are selected for the program. We found in the third paper that students in the classes were disproportionately from higher SES backgrounds but that there was a tendency for students from a low-SES background to be more likely to pursue a career in sports. However, those from high social backgrounds were more likely to pursue a life without elite sports. This finding is consistent with Dumais (2002), who found that *habitus* – derived largely from students’ social backgrounds – strongly affected students’ educational aspirations and their decisions to invest further in education.

¹² A recent report from FIFPro showed similar tendencies for female football players (FIFPro, 2017).

Students' perceptions of probabilities for success in education, which were related to both socioeconomic status and gender, were also related to their commitments to education and influenced their grades. Parents with high-SES backgrounds, which we used as a combined measure of cultural and economic capital, might be more likely to want their children to pursue education because this career path is perceived to have a higher likelihood of success than pursuing a career in professional sports. Indeed, this perception is borne out by examining the numbers of positions in the occupational structure. That parents with high cultural capital steer their children in that direction was also found in the first paper, in which some parents spoke of a preferred career path. Indeed, considering all three stages of the SportsClass program, parents' socioeconomic background appears important in gaining access to the program, maintaining position in the SportsClass and for future aspirations. It is interesting that parents' higher social background was an advantage in gaining access to the SportsClass and in handling injuries but was associated with less likelihood of having future aspirations in elite sports.

To summarize, the relationship between cultural capital and type of sport can also be part of how students construct their aspirations in sports and education. Considering that some sports in the Danish sports field present better opportunities for a professional career, the perception of the opportunity structure in these sports as opposed to other sports might influence how students construct their aspirations. My studies suggest that the students' habitus reflects how the class structure intersects with educational and athletic opportunity. The observed relationship between social background and gaining access to SportsClasses show how families with different types and amounts of capital relate to the educational system and to special programs offered through the schools.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

In this dissertation, I set out to investigate how talent is practiced in Danish SportsClasses and the wider social implications of this approach. I posed the following subquestions in order to answer my research question: *How are students selected for the SportsClasses, how do SportsClass students experience the SportsClass and how does this experience relate to their social background, type of sport and gender, and Given their social background, gender, and type of sport, how do SportsClass students construct their aspirations in sports and education?*

In my three articles, I provided detailed insights into the selection process, the SportsClass students' experiences in and of the SportsClasses, the SportsClass students' future aspirations, and how these factors were related to the students' social background, type of sport and gender.

In my analyses of the selection process, I showed in this dissertation and in research product 1 how Team Danmark's framework for talent development in SportsClasses is not as open for all or as meritocratic as was perhaps intended by the Elite Sports Law. By approaching the SportsClass program from a sociological perspective, I showed in paper 3 that athletes from middle- and higher-SES backgrounds were overrepresented in these programs. The skewness toward middle- and upper-middle-class children in the SportsClass and toward male athletes indicates that the selection process and the organization of youth sports favor some social groups over others. I viewed talent as a reflection of an agent's (in this case the applicant's) display of embodied cultural capital, the cultivation of which depends upon the resources available to the agent. According to my findings, those who have the resources to develop the talent necessary to be defined as sufficiently "talented" [by those sufficiently powerful to define "talent"] for the SportsClasses come disproportionately from middle- and high-SES backgrounds. This relationship appears to be reinforced by the SportsClasses and the free school choice that allow

parents to move their children, which is something more middle- and upper-middle-class parents take advantage of. Thus, the SportsClasses might become a reinforcer for the patterns of social stratification in organized youth sports in which middle- and upper-middle-class children are overrepresented.

Because I chose to study the talented athletes when they were enrolled in a dual-career program instead of relying on retrospective reports as many previous studies have, I gained firsthand insights into the SportsClass students' experiences. I investigated how these experiences were related to students' social background, choice of sport and gender. This approach, combined with the two surveys, showed that many of the students had struggled with injuries and some with loss of interest in Sports when in the SportsClass program. This finding raises the question of whether the SportsClass program inadvertently encourages earlier specialization in talent development. Furthermore, by conducting an ethnographic study that focused on both the sport *and* school aspect of the students' lives, I found that injuries did much more than prevent the SportsClass students from participating in sports. The perceived risk of being excluded from the class if they could not perform in sports created a stressful situation for students with injuries that influenced the students' entire social life. These findings suggest that focusing solely on SportsClass students' sporting lives misses the complexity of such talent development programs.

With respect to students' aspirations in school and in sports, I found that using classifications such as gender and social background inspired by a Bourdieusian framework revealed huge differences in the students' aspirations. The female SportsClass students indicated that they had virtually no interest in pursuing sports as a career. Their habitus reflected their perception of an opportunity structure that barely included sports and reinforces education as central to their futures. I found a similar pattern for the SportsClass students from higher and middle-SES backgrounds, who did appreciate the possibilities of the dual-career path but might end up losing their focus on a career in elite sports because education is inscribed in their habitus and has much more certain outcomes.

Overall, my study suggest that sport-sociological inspired analyses that are attentive to social background and gender should be given much more attention in research on talent development and in dual-career initiatives than most research has given them to date. By conducting a structuralist constructivist study I found that students in the SportsClasses were disproportionally from middle- and high-SES backgrounds and that students from middle- and high-SES backgrounds were better at maintaining their position in the SportsClass when faced with an injury. However, these students were less likely to aspire to a career in sports compared with those from low-SES backgrounds. My findings have shown that access to these programs is not as meritocratic as we believe it to be or as much as it was intended to be. It is about more than an inherent talent or hours of practicing. At different levels of talent development programs such as the SportsClasses, there are external factors that influence who gains access (e.g., number of positions for specific sports available in the classes and number of applicants). Recognizing that talent development is about more than simply identifying the display of embodied capital – it also reflects access to a broad variety of resources that have different values in different contexts – could help to devise policies that succeed in creating opportunity for all applicants rather than reproducing social structures.

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Appendix A. Club letter

19 August 2013, København og Aalborg [Club letter]

PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT SPORTSCLASSES AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Dear Club board

We are three researchers, Jens Christian Nielsen and Jesper Olesen from Aarhus University and Lotte S. Skrubbeltrang from Aalborg University, who are investigating what it entails to be a student in a SportsClass and what it means for young athletes' talent development and learning. The research is conducted in collaboration with X municipality and other elite municipalities in Denmark, Team Danmark and the Ministry of Education. As part of the research project, the SportsClass students have already answered a questionnaire before the summer holiday.

We, primarily Lotte, will visit the SportsClasses in your municipality to observe the morning practices and school days during the next year. The visits will be scheduled in collaboration with teachers and coaches in charge of the morning practices. During the visits, we will interview students in the SportsClasses. We will talk to them about what being in a SportsClass means for their participation in sports, their education, everyday life and future aspirations. The students will be asked to take photos of some of the things they experience during their day. This material will be used during the student interviews. None of this material will be used without permission from, for example, students, teachers, school, and clubs.

We also want to follow some of the students more intensely. This activity could entail following the students from when they leave for school in the morning, during school and practices and at home. This work will provide insights about what a day in the life of SportsClass student looks like. Students and parents will of course be asked beforehand whether they want to participate. We will also ask the clubs involved for permission to observe club practices. We will be in contact about this process when it becomes relevant.

Should any questions arise, please feel free to contact the following:

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Appendix B. Teacher letter

19 August 2013, København og Aalborg

PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT SPORTSCLASSES AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Dear teacher in SportsClass 8.x

We are three researchers Jens Christian Nielsen and Jesper Olesen from Aarhus University og Lotte S. Skrubbelttrang from Aalborg University, who are investigating what it entails to be a student in a SportsClass and what it means for young athletes' talent development and learning. The research is conducted in collaboration with X municipality and other elite municipalities in Denmark, Team Danmark and the Ministry of Education. As part of the research project, the SportsClass students have already answered a questionnaire before the summer holiday.

We, primarily Lotte, will visit the SportsClasses in your municipality to observe the morning practices and school days during the next year. The visits will be scheduled in collaboration with you, the teachers and coaches in charge of the morning practices. During the visits, we will interview students in the SportsClasses. We will talk to them about what being in a SportsClass means for their participation in sports, their education, everyday life and future aspirations. The students will be asked to take photos of some of the things they experience during their day. This material will be used during the student interviews. None of this material will be used without permission from, for example, students, parents, teachers, school, and clubs.

We also want to follow some of the students more intensely in the first quarter of 2014. This activity could entail that we follow the students from when they leave for school in the morning, during school and practices and at home. This work will provide insights about what a day in the life of a SportsClass student looks like. Students and parents will of course be asked beforehand whether they want to participate. We will also ask the clubs involved for permission to observe club practices. We will be in contact about this process when it becomes relevant.

Should any questions arise, please feel free to contact the following:

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Appendix C. Student letter

28 August 2013, København og Aalborg

PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT SPORTSCLASSES AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Dear student in SportsClass 8.x

We are three researchers, Jens Christian Nielsen and Jesper Olesen from Aarhus University and Lotte S. Skrubbeltang from Aalborg University, who are investigating what it entails to be a student in a SportsClass and what it means for young athletes' talent development and learning. The research is conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Team Danmark and elite municipalities in Denmark. On behalf of Elite Sport X, these X municipalities support the project and hope for your positive participation in the project. As part of the research project, you have already answered a questionnaire before the summer holiday.

We, primarily Lotte, will visit the SportsClasses in your municipality to observe some of the morning practices and school days during the next year. During these visits, we would like to interview some of you and talk to you during the school day. We want to talk to you about what being in the SportsClass means for your participation in sports, education, everyday life and future aspirations. You and your classmates will also be asked to take photos of some of the things you experience during your day. This material will be used during the student interviews. You will hear more about this process later.

We also want to follow some of you more intensely in the beginning of 2014. This activity could entail that we follow you from when you leave for school in the morning, during school and practices and at home. You will of course be asked beforehand whether you want to participate.

We hope you think it will be interesting to participate in the project and will help us understand what it means to be a SportsClass student.

If you or others have any questions about the research project, please feel free to contact the following:

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Appendix D. Parent letter

28 August 2013, Copenhagen and Aalborg

PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT SPORTSCLASSES AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Dear parents to students in SportsClass 8.x

We are three researchers, Jens Christian Nielsen and Jesper Olesen from Aarhus University and Lotte S. Skrubbelttrang from Aalborg University, who are investigating what it entails to be a student in a SportsClass and what it means for young athletes' talent development and learning. The research is conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Team Danmark and elite municipalities in Denmark. On behalf of Elite Sport X, these X municipalities support the project and hope for your positive participation in the project. As part of the research project, your child has already answered a questionnaire before the summer holiday.

During the next year, we, primarily Lotte, will visit the SportsClasses in your municipality to observe some of the morning practices and school days during the next year. When we visit the school, we also want to interview the students and talk to them about what being in the SportsClass means for their participation in sports, education, everyday life and future aspirations. The students will also be asked to take photos to document some of the things they experience during their day. This material will be used in our conversations with the students. None of this material will be used without permission from students and parents.

We also want to follow some of the students more intensely in the first quarter of 2014. This activity could entail following the students from when they leave for school in the morning, during school and practices and at home. This work will provide insights about what a day in the life of a SportsClass student looks like. You will of course be asked beforehand whether you want to participate and provide such insights into your child's and your life.

If you have any questions about the research project, feel free to contact the following:

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Appendix E. Interview guide student fall 2013

Interview guide – in pairs

Choice of sport:

- Which sports have you played?
- Why did you choose X (choice of sports)?
- Do you ever play some of the sports you also played?

Talent assessment:

- How did you find out that you were good at playing X?
- When was the first time someone described you as talented or as a talent?
- Who called you talented?

Development in sport:

- How have you improved/developed your skills in sports since you started in the SportsClass?
- How do you measure this development/improvement? (For example, feedback from coaches or teammates, or results)
- Who and what are important for your development?

Being in the SportsClass:

- How was the transition into the SportsClass?
- What has it changed in your life?
- How is this class compared to your old ones?
- Do you miss something from the old classes?

Social life in the SportsClass:

- Who do you hang out with?
- Who else hangs out?
- Is the social life in the SportsClass driven by the type of sport people play?
- Is there a hierarchy in the class?
- Who are the leading forces in the class?
- Does how good you are at sports define your social position in the class?

The SportsClass as an elite sports environment and community:

- How does being in the SportsClass support you in pursuing sports? How has it changed?
- What do you gain by having classmates who play sports at a high level?

Balancing school and sports:

- The SportsClasses provide an opportunity to combine school and sports. What is most important for you? School or Sports?
- How will you combine school and sports in the future?
- Can you make a living as a fulltime professional athlete in your sport?
- Is it your intention to make a living playing x?

Expectations:

- Many SportsClass students have mentioned in an evaluation of SportsClasses that they felt that there are high expectations for them to perform in school and sports. How have you experienced this?

Pros and cons of the SportsClasses:

- Many of the students who participated in the evaluation responded that they missed having time for parties, visiting family and friends and having an after-school job but that this is the price they must pay to pursue a career in sports. Do you think you must pay a high price for playing elite sports? Do you think it is worth this price?

Your family:

- How do your families help you with respect to school and sports? How does it work in practice?

Appendix F. Interview guide student fall 2014 and spring 2015

Interview guide – student individual

Development in Sports:

- How have you improved in your sport from 8th–9th grade?
- What have been indicators of this improvement?
 - Drafting, practice, positive or negative results, personal records, injuries, change in coaches, different year groups (1. or 2. years)
- Who has helped influence this development (also if negative)?
 - What role has the SportsClass played in your development?
- What have you been aware of with respect to your development?
- How is the relationship between practice and matches/games/tournaments?
– In which is it most important to perform well?
- How do you want to pursue sports in the future? What are your goal(s)/ambitions?
- How to you set these goals?
 - Alone, with your coach, teammates, parents, friends?
 - How do you access your opportunities?
 - How do others access your opportunities?

Practice:

- What do you consider a good practice?
- What do you do to make it a good practice?
- How do you prepare for a practice?
- What do you do during the practice?
- What do you do after the practice?

SportsClasses:

- What do you think you would have done if the SportsClasses had not existed?
- What do you think that would have meant for your development in sports and school?

Talent assessment:

- What is talent? How important do you think talent is to be able to succeed in elite sports as an adult?
- How do others assess yours and others' talent?
- What do others' assessments of your talent mean for you?
- What do you think is important if one wants to do well in Sports?

Balancing School and sports:

- How was the transition from 8th to 9th grade?
- How do you experience the relationship between school and sports in the SportsClasses?
- What is most important for you – school or sports? Why?
- How has that changed since 8th grade?
 - Why do you think that is?
- What is important if one wants to do well in a SportsClass?
 - Has that changed from 7th–9th grade?
- What do you want to do when you graduate 9th grade?
 - And in the long term?
 - How so? Who have you discussed this with? A guidance counsellor, your friends, parents, coaches?

The SportsClass as an elite sports environment and community:

- How does being in the SportsClass support you in pursuing sports? How has it changed?
- What do you gain by having classmates who play sports at a high level?
- Who do you hang out with in school? Who hangs out with whom?
 - Do you typically hang out with people who play the same sport as you?
 - Has that changed? If so – why, do you think? (change in engagement in sport)
- Who are the most influential in the class? (social hierarchy)
- Have some of your classmates quit sports or lowered their ambitions?
 - What has that meant for the class as an elite sports environment?
 - What has that meant for the social life in the class?
 - Is this change something you have discussed, and if so – how?

School:

- How do you feel about the exams?
- Which subjects would you prefer for the exams?
- How do you feel about graduating from the SportsClass?

Appendix G. Interview guide parents

Choice of sport:

- How did X (student's name) end up playing y (type of sports)
- Did X play other types of sports?
- What were your considerations in choosing that sport over the others?

Parents' backgrounds in sports:

- Did you grow up playing sports?
- Did you play elite sports?
- What about X's sibling(s) – Does/do he/she/they play any sports?

Talent:

- When did you find out that X was good at playing Y?
 - o How did you experience it?
- When was the first time he/she was referred to as a 'talent'?
 - o How would you define talent?
- What does it mean to you, that X is good at playing Y?

Development:

- How has X improved his/her skills in Y since X started in the SportsClass?
- How have you seen this improvement?
- What and who is important for X to improve in his/her sport?
- What is most important for you, with respect to X's development?

The SportsClass:

- What factors did you consider when deciding to move X to a SportsClass?
 - o What factors did you consider when applying for 7th, 8th or 9th grade? How did you and X discuss this?
- How has the transition to the SportsClass been? For you and for X?
- What did it change in your life?
- How did you experience the entrance exams and the time after, waiting to hear back? Do you remember how you felt? How X felt?
- In your mind, what are the advantages of the SportsClass?
- How do you experience the collaboration between the school and the club? What do you think could be improved?

Balancing school and sports:

- How do you and X discuss the relationship between school and sports? What aspects do you emphasize as important?
- How do you experience the relationship between school and sports in the SportsClass? What do teachers focus on, and what do the students focus on?
- What is your main priority and why?

Expectations:

- What are your expectations for X?
- Many SportsClass students have mentioned in an evaluation of SportsClasses that they feel that there are high expectations for them to perform in school and sports. Is that something you have also considered? Has X ever mentioned that it can occasionally be difficult to manage both school and sports?

Pros and cons of the SportsClasses:

- Many of the students who participated in the evaluation responded that they missed having time for parties, visiting family and friends and having an after-school job, but that this is the price they must pay to pursue a career in sports. How have you considered this issue in relation to X and the time he/she spends on sports?
 - o Are you afraid that he/she misses out because he/she spends this much time playing sports?
 - o Have you discussed it with X, and if so, what did X say?

Being parent to a SportsClass student:

- How is it being parent to a child in a SportsClass?
- How does having a child that plays sports so much affect your family?
- How much do you help X during a normal day in preparing for and coming to and from school and practice? Do you occasionally feel that it is difficult having to help so much?
- How would you describe X?

Appendix H. Interview guide – Elite sports teacher representative

History:

- How long have you been part of the SportsClass program?
- How have the SportsClasses and the framework around the SportsClasses changed in the time you have been here?
- Why do you think they have changed in that direction?
- What influence has the change in leadership had on the SportsClasses?
- What influence has the new school reform had on the SportsClasses?
- How do you experience the collaboration with the A-classes [regular classes]?

The SportsClasses' aim:

- How would you describe the SportsClasses' aim?
- What are the success criteria? What do you expect from the SportsClasses and the SportsClass students?
- Where do you expect the talents to go when they reach their potential? E.g., best football league in Denmark og more mass sports participation?
- How would you describe the typical SportsClass student? Is it your experience that this description differs depending upon type of sport?

Peter's job:

- When was your job description created?
- What types of task are associated with your job description?
- What is your role in relation to the entrance exams?
- How do you experience the collaboration between school and clubs?

Drop out:

- What do you do if a SportsClass student no longer fits the talent description and the student is in 8th grade?

- Do you have a specific procedure for exiting sports? Please describe it.
- How do you feel about some students frequently being away with their sport – for example, at camp?
 - What is your role in this?

Selection – understanding talent:

- How was the selection process created – and how is it financed? Has it changed in shape or form during the years you have held these responsibilities?
- What do they focus on when selecting for the different sports? Do you see any commonalities across sports in selecting talent? If so – what are these?
- Do you experience differences among the local clubs and the national experts in conducting the entrance exams, or understanding of talent? If so – which?

Challenges:

- What do you consider as challenges for the SportsClasses?
- What do you think must be developed?

Appendix I. Interview guide elite coordinator – municipality

Interview guide – elite coordinator

History:

- How has the model for SportsClasses been established in NN municipality?
- Who have been the driving forces in developing the model for SportsClasses in NN municipality?
- How has the model been changed since 2008?

The SportsClasses' aim:

- How would you describe the SportsClasses' aim?
- What are the success criteria? What do you expect from the SportsClasses and the SportsClass students?
- Where do you expect the talents to go when they reach their potential? E.g., best football league in Denmark og more mass sports participation?

Economy:

- What is the economic background for the SportsClasses? What types of expenses does the municipality cover? Do the schools where the SportsClasses are located receive any type of special support – for example, for facilities or equipment?
- How are the morning practices financed? (the sport specifically and the general morning practice)
- Do the students receive economic support for, e.g., transportation? Are there certain expenses related to being a SportsClass student, e.g., if the students are from a different municipality?
- How much do the entrance exams cost?

Organization:

- Who is in charge of what – what types of organization and collaboration exist among municipality, school and clubs?
- Do you have any formalized contracts for these collaborations? If so, what do these contracts consist of?
 - What type of obligations do the different parties have? What types of demands/expectations exist?

Number of spots/SportsClass students and selection?

- What decides the number of SportsClass students? – How did you decide this number? What decides how many students you enroll in the classes each year? Would you like to be able enroll more students?
- How do you distribute numbers of seats in the class for each type of sport? Do you prioritize some sports in the municipality?
- Do prioritized sports have any say in the selection process?
- Is it your opinion that there can be too many or too few from one sport? E.g., are you seeking a specific number of football players? Are you selecting a team or individual distribution between boys and girls?
- What is the history behind why you prioritize some sports over others? – What are the possibilities for other sports to get the same status?
- Does it (that some sports have priority) have any influence on the chances to become enrolled for students from nonpriority sports?
- What do you do if a SportsClass student no longer fits the talent description and the student is in 8th grade? Do you have a specific procedure for exiting sports? Please describe it.

Selection – understanding talent:

- How was the selection process created – and how is it financed? Has it changed in shape or form during the years you have held these responsibilities?
- What do they focus on when selecting for the different sports? Do you see any commonalities across sports in selecting talents? If so – what are these?
- Do you experience differences among the local clubs and the national experts with respect to conducting the entrance exams, understanding of talent? If so – which?

Challenges:

- What sets this municipality's model for SportsClasses apart from other SportsClasses – how is it different from other elite municipalities?
- What do you consider challenges for the SportsClasses?
- What do you think must be developed?
- What are the next steps in the municipality's strategy for selecting talents; are there still areas that must be developed?

Appendix J. Overview of questions used from survey 1

[1-single]

What sport do you play?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Athletics • 2. Badminton • 3. Track Cycling • 4. Basketball • 5. Beach Volleyball • 6. BMX • 7. Boxing • 8. Table tennis • 9. Bowling • 10. Wrestling • 11. Archery • 12. Cycle racing • 13. Football 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14. Fencing • 15. Golf • 16. Handball • 17. Artistic gymnastics • 18. Ice Hockey • 19. Judo • 20. Kayak • 21. Karate • 22. Motocross • 23. Orienteering • 24. Horseback riding • 25. Rowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26. Sailing • 27. Shooting • 28. Speedway • 29. Sports dance • 30. Squash • 31. Swimming • 32. Taekwondo • 33. Tennis • 34. Trampoline • 35. Triathlon • 36. Volleyball • 37. Other
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[93-single]

Has/have one or both of your parents participated in sports at an elite level?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

Appendix K. Overview of questions used from survey 2

[q25 – CATEGORICAL – single – Must answer]

What do you want to do after high school/ youth education?

- ☐ (_1) Get a degree <i>and</i> compete in elite sports
- ☐ (_2) Get a degree <i>but not</i> compete in elite sports
- ☐ (_3) Get a job <i>and</i> compete in elite sports
- ☐ (_4) Get a job <i>but not</i> compete in elite sports
- ☐ (_5) Become a fulltime professional athlete
- ☐ (_6) I do not know yet

[q29B – CATEGORICAL – single – Must answer]

Do you still play the sport you for which you were selected for the sports classes?

- ☐ (_1) Ja
- ☐ (_2) Nej

[q31 – CATEGORICAL – single – Must answer]

Is it your goal to be among the best in your sport?

- ☐ (_1) yes
- ☐ (_2) No

[q43new – CATEGORICAL – single – Must answer]

To what extent have you improved in your sport due to the morning practices provided in the sports classes?

- ☐ (_1) to a great extent
- ☐ (_2) to some extent
- ☐ (_3) to a lesser extent
- ☐ (_4) to a lesser extent
- ☐ (_5) Not at all

[q61 – CATEGORICAL – single – Must answer]

Have you at any given time when you were in the sports class pushed yourself so much so that it affected your enjoyment of your sport?

- ☐ (_1) yes
- ☐ (_2) No

[q62 – CATEGORICAL – single – Must answer]

Have you at any given time pushed yourself so much so that it led to becoming injured?

- ☐ (_1) yes
- ☐ (_2) No

[q63 – CATEGORICAL – single – Must answer]

Has there been a time or several times during your time in the sports class when you could not be bothered to invest the time and energy necessary to reach the elite?

- ☐ (_1) yes
- ☐ (_2) No

Appendix L. Overview of qualitative data

	2013	2014	2015	Total
Classroom observations (days)	13	9	2	24
Entrance exams (days)		4		4
Parent teacher meeting (days)	1	2		3
All day observations students (days)		3	1	4
Interviews – students in pairs	4	3		7
Individual Interviews students		11	9	20
Interviews teachers	1	1	1	3
Interview Parents		3	1	4
Interview Elite coordinator		1		1

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